



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

3 3433 07606496 7

DETSY
ROSS



CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS



[illegible]

BETSY ROSS

By C. C. HOTCHKISS.

Betsy Ross.

A Romance of the Flag.

12mo. Cloth, \$1.50.

The romance which the author has woven around the origin of our flag will quicken the pulse of every reader by the wealth of striking characters and dramatic incidents, and the absorbing interest of the plot. History has furnished a motive which has been curiously neglected in fiction, and the picturesque figures of the time, sea-rangers and Quakers, redcoats and Continental soldiers, and even Washington himself, have to do with the development of a strange and thrilling story wherein Betsy Ross takes the leading part.

A Colonial Free-Lance.

12mo. Cloth, \$1.00; paper, 50 cents.

"Altogether a distinct addition to the historical romances of to-day."—*Boston Transcript*.

"It is not too high praise to say that the author has given us in this story the most satisfactory account of the British occupancy of New York that has yet been furnished in the guise of fiction."—*New York Times*.

In Defiance of the King.

A Romance of the American Revolution.

12mo. Cloth, \$1.00; paper, 50 cents.

"Mr. Hotchkiss has etched in burning words a story of British cruelty, Yankee bravery, and true love that thrills from beginning to end with the spirit of the Revolution. . . . Though he is often deliberate, he rushes along breathlessly when the occasion demands. His whole story is so absorbing that you will sit up far into the night to finish it. You lay it aside with the feeling that you have seen a gloriously true picture of the Revolution."—*Boston Herald*.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.

BETSY ROSS

A Romance of the Flag

By

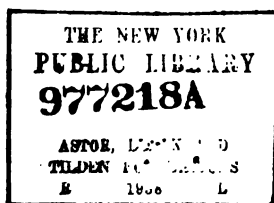
CHAUNCEY C. HOTCHKISS

*Author of In Defiance of the King
and A Colonial Free Lance*



New York
D. Appleton and Company

1901



COPYRIGHT, 1901,
By D. APPLETON AND COMPANY.

*All dramatic rights reserved by
Henry A. Du Souchet.*

NOV 18 1901
NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

TO MY FRIEND
HENRY A. DU SOUCHET,
WHOSE DRAMA OF BETSY ROSS FORMS
THE BASIS OF THIS ROMANCE,
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHOR.

W J R 19 FEB '36

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PRELUDE	I
I.—THE BAG O' NAILS	5
II.—A DISCIPLE OF NEMESIS	18
III.—MISTRESS NELLIE ASHBURN	32
IV.—A WOMAN'S WAY	42
V.—ON BANK HILL	50
VI.—THE RED CLOAK	58
VII.—VERNON'S CRISIS	65
VIII.—BETSY KEEPS TRYST	69
IX.—THE CURSE OF THE RED CLOAK	79
X.—THE FIGHT	86
XI.—THE MARTYR	92
XII.—THEE MUST ATONE!	101
XIII.—"NO LIGHT! NO LIGHT!"	112
XIV.—THE FLIGHT OF TIME	117
XV.—A PERTURBED SPIRIT	125
XVI.—JUDGE VERNON	129
XVII.—CROSS PURPOSES	138
XVIII.—THE LITTLE SHOP	150
XIX.—MISTRESS ASHBURN GETS EVEN	163
XX.—THE SPY	173
XXI.—MRS. VERNON MEETS DEFEAT	182
XXII.—FROM THE DEAD	193

Betsy Ross

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIII.—THE FLAG COMMITTEE	207
XXIV.—THE LITTLE BACK PARLOR	215
XXV.—THE FLIGHT	228
XXVI.—THE BREAKING OF THE STORM	234
XXVII.—A WOMAN'S WIT	246
XXVIII.—A FOUL DAY, BUT FAIR	261
XXIX.—AT CLOSE QUARTERS	271
XXX.—A DELICATE SITUATION	280
XXXI.—THE CRISIS	294
XXXII.—THE INTERVIEW	303
XXXIII.—THE CLOUDS BREAK	316
XXXIV.—BETSY COMMITS A FELONY	329
XXXV.—THE RIDE	342
XXXVI.—AT BORDENTOWN	351
XXXVII.—THE ENDING	360

BETSY ROSS

PRELUDE

CENTURIES have not changed the character of the barren sand keys of the Dry Tortugas, and centuries will not. They are the epitome of loneliness; they have the cleanliness of dry bones, and might suggest from a distance bleached skulls rising from the depths of the bluest of blue seas. They vary in size from yards to rods to acres; they are ever shifting in dimensions and in shape; they are the most abandoned spots of land upon God's earth. A tropical sun scorches them, a tropical sea laps or lashes them, a glorious yet pitiless sky canopies them, and they bury their own dead. The bones of the buccaneers or their victims who have perished on these burning islands, marooned to a hideous fate, are hidden by the next hurricane, and a fresh surface of sand, yellow-white, greets the sun. Severally, they have no antiquity; they are like gigantic and ever-shifting stepping-stones, miles apart in a shallow sea. They suggest loneliness, thirst, starvation, despair, delirium, death. They are grisly with all horrors.

In the year of grace seventeen hundred and fifty-

Betsy Ross

six there was life on one of these keys. A low surf swung along the edge of the half-submerged sand dune and the sun beat witheringly from a clear sky, making sharp the contrast between the yellow sand, the dazzling white spume of the brine, and the deep topaz of the sea, limitless on all sides. Some two miles off the land (if the glistening acre of sand could be so called) lay a brig with sails aback breaking the blank of sky and water—a peaceable trader to all appearances, for her rig and rake gave no hint of the skull and crossbones concealed in her flag locker.

More than a score of men were upon the sand. Beside a large hole dug in its most elevated point lay two chests, iron-bound, iron-knobbed, and pad-locked. Several men were still digging, and all were swarthy, bearded, hideous in purpose, and more cruel than death. They were buccaneers, pirates, burying their booty. A boat containing five men was halfway between shore and ship. Four of the inmates were rowing like mad, laughing, cursing, and shaking their coarse fists at those on the island, yet giving strange and unusual deference to the fifth, a one-armed man, who sat gloomily in the stern, never looking back.

From the sand the boat grows smaller—it melts into the ship. Slowly swing the yards as though undermanned; the canvas of the brig is no longer aback. The cat's-paw crawling over the face of the ocean wafts the vessel into movement, and as the minutes wane she drops to the horizon and sinks lower and lower to the eyes of the petrified score

Prelude

who remain on the barren, sun-baked key. For a time they stand looking seaward like senseless blocks; then suspicion grows apace; questions, answers, and curses fly about, and there comes a wild rush to the chests. They are broken open in mad haste, shot after shot being fired into the padlocks. The contents are turned out on the glittering sand, a black and red mass. The gold, the jewels, the *rouleaus* they all knew so well, are gone; the chests contain scrap iron only, and that red with rust. Treachery and crime have met cruelty and crime—the men are marooned on a barren sand key.

They know the result. They raise their fists and bearded faces to the remorseless sky and wildly call down curses on those who have betrayed them. The grave has received them alive, and the hideous certainty of their fate unbinds instead of chains the devil within them. The sand is torn by their racing feet; blood flows from flesh self-bitten in rage. The air, trembling in the heat, is rent by strange oaths and impotent imprecations. Some wade into the glistening sea gnashing their teeth and shouting at the fading brig. In the knowledge of their condition, their desperate circumstance, of the fate to which they have so many times condemned the innocent, brute-like they fight among themselves; knives flash, and burly forms clinch and struggle, then cease, look at each other blankly, and sit on the hot sand groaning.

The day wanes. The beauty of the ocean mocks them; there is death in its brine. The cool breeze

Betsy Ross

of the evening mocks them ; it is velvety, spiced in some land far and fair, and is delicious, but there is starvation and delirium in it ; it does not feed them. Some kneel to pray in terror and rise to curse in fury. There is no cry to a merciful God ; all is for vengeance—vengeance.

And with the night comes the silence of despair.

CHAPTER I

THE BAG O' NAILS *

THE coffeeroom, or taproom, or sitting room (it might be either or all three) of the tavern was a wonderfully cozy spot in rough weather, or, in fact, in weather of any sort. Its immense fireplace was a mass of dancing flame, and the throat of the great chimney gave forth a low, musical humming due to the strength of the rushing draught. The lowering sun brightened the interior of the room with the clear, thin light peculiar to winter afternoons, and brought out every detail of objects, animate and inanimate, within. Of the former there were a number, all males, from the stately humility of the well-to-do Quaker to the latest contingent in His Majesty's service, gay in scarlet uniform and obtrusive in the metallic ring of scabbard or spur.

The Bag o' Nails was distinguished for three things: its undoubted English ale, knowing naught but of wood until it struck its final receptacle—a shining pewter flagon; its homelike air which extended from the kitchen to the very stable; and the inflexible loyalty of its host. And this last consid-

* Corruption of "The Bacchanals," an old English tavern.

Betsy Ross

eration was of no small moment in the days of 1773. The political pot in America was simmering in a manner much too lively for the comfort of the English Parliament, and the loyal adherents to George III of England were glad to possess one house at least in which they might gather and have their aristocratic ears unassailed by mutterings or outspoken maledictions against His Gracious Majesty. There might have been other houses of call in Philadelphia where the name of George of England and the acts of the British Parliament might have been received without provoking adverse comment at all times; but in no hostelry save the Bag o' Nails might one hear the people of Boston openly damned as heretical and rebels in more than embryo, and for the sentiment receive nothing but applause. There was no question as to the political opinions of the habitués of the Bag o' Nails, but at times a wasp will stumble into a beehive and create consternation, and the tavern in question was liable to such accident, for those who sympathized with the colonies in their dispute with the mother country were growing stronger in faith, less conservative in expression, and were somewhat given to proselytizing.

On the side of the room farthest from the fire sat three men talking in low tones. The largest one of the three was a man of severe countenance, the stern aspect of his gray eye, almost concealed by bushy black eyebrows, running well with his square jaw and chin and firm, thin-lipped mouth. Both dress and speech proclaimed him Quaker, but his

The Bag o' Nails

clean-shaven countenance bore no hint of meekness, the cornerstone of that gentle sect, nor did the conventional cut of his garb conceal the costliness of the stuff entering into its makeup. The sight of him suggested wealth, dignity, and a measure of self-esteem which was accentuated by his large frame, portly body, and deep voice, as well as by his air of conscious superiority. On a settle drawn near the fire sat a young man of about twenty years gazing abstractedly into the flames. On the floor lay a portmanteau (called a portmantle in those days), while handily on the settle stood a Georgius Rex jug of ale which once in a while he tasted and returned to its place. His dress was plain, and, though of superior material, had the flavor of the sea, and that he was a person of quality was indicated by the sword at his hip and the whiteness of his ungloved hand. His face, somewhat browned by exposure, bore that expression of health and good will to the world that is only seen in early manhood and lusty old age. Not far removed stood a long oak table black with years and use, and sitting thereat were two men of about the age of the individual just described. One was a British officer in the glory of his first regimentals, while the other was a civilian richly dressed, a light sword of the sort commonly carried lying before him on the table. His countenance and bearing were aristocratic, but the natural paleness of his face was in a measure overcome by the liquor he had been too freely drinking, for his partial intoxication was as plain to be seen as the bottle in

Betsy Ross

front of him, and his natural gentility of manner and speech was coarsened as the effects of the liquor increased. The officer, several degrees more sober than his companion, was laughing with semi-drunken heartiness at something said by the civilian, though the voice of neither was loud enough nor their manners too boisterous to be out of place in the taproom, and at an epoch when to be drunk at least once a day might have been the badge, and was the privilege, of the highest gentility.

"But to come back to the subject, Vernon," said the officer, restraining his laughter and laying his hand on the plum-colored sleeve of his *vis-a-vis*. "Is the father of your dove-colored inamorata well to do?"

"Aye; a glorious ole hyp—hypocrite," was the answer; "a mealy-mouthed Quaker—who wor—worships the king because he thinks the king will bet—better protect his guineas. Who has—never min', never min'; there's a big profit in wool. Less have 'nother bot—bottle."

"Nay," returned the other, "I have sense enough left to know my limit. 'Tis the d——ndst headiest stuff I ever drank. What do you call it?"

"Applejack; it's better'n wine for a cole night. Less have——"

"Faith!" interrupted the soldier, "I knew nothing of it in England and care to know nothing more of it here. Make it Madeira and I am with you."

"A'right. Madeira or anything you say, an' we'll drink to the health of——"

The Bag o' Nails

He stopped suddenly and cast a bleary eye on his companion and then let it rove in drunken suspicion aimlessly about, until at last he fixed his seemingly vacant gaze upon the trio across the room. With scowling intentness he scrutinized the old Quaker who had removed his hat in order to wipe his bald crown, then a maudlin smile overspread his countenance. "By G—d!" he whispered stridently, bending forward confidentially to the officer; "by G—d! thasser father! Fine ole bird, hey?"

His voice was loud enough for all in the room to hear, but as there had been no names mentioned, no apparent notice was taken of the remark, though the Quaker looked about suddenly, scanned closely the couple at the table, and then resumed his conversation.

The fumes of the liquor which he had consumed rose higher and higher in the brain of the youth, and by the time the Madeira which had been called for was uncorked and poured, the wits of the man called Vernon were in no shape to grapple with difficulties, and, indeed, the aimless ugliness of mood peculiar to some natures at such times was growing with the growth of his intoxication. After a moment or two of silence and seemingly deep cogitation, broken by frequent and violent hiccoughs, the young man gathered his legs beneath him, rose slowly from his chair, looked about him as though to command attention to a great effort, and grasping the stem of his wineglass, held it up as he ejaculated:

"Ha' ye heard the news from Boston? Hur-

Betsy Ross

rah! (hic) the tea has been thrown overboard. Hurrah!"

The words rang through the hushed room like a bell, but before the astonished hearers could express their surprise he continued: "Here's to the total damnation of King George and the tax on tea!"

Had a mine been sprung in the cellar of the Bag o' Nails, it would hardly have created more consternation. The host, half-dreaming in the bar, heard it, and his mouth opened in astonishment, if not in protest. The officer sprang to his feet and laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword as though to resent a personal insult; the young man on the settle looked up suddenly, while the Quakers dropped their conversation, the elder swinging about as though struck, both anger and astonishment showing in his eye.

"I thought I'd wake 'em up," said the young man, laughing tipsily, addressing himself to no one in particular and paying no attention to the menacing attitude of his companion. "Who can carve a better toast than that? Heigho, Friend Broadbrim!" he fairly shouted, with a quick change of subject, as the Quaker rose from his chair and straightened his ponderous form while he faced the now wild and seemingly desperate young man, "did thee know thee was goin' to have a Whig for a son-in-law? Did thee know that thy charming daughter has less love for the king than her——"

"For shame, young man!" thundered the

The Bag o' Nails

Quaker, advancing toward the table and pointing at the reeling youth with his heavy gold-headed cane. "Thy news is hours old. Little did I think to see thee, the son of Judge Vernon, in this condition, or hear such sentiments from the son of a gentleman holding a king's commission. I forgive thee thy insults. Get thee home and to bed."

"Insults!" jeered Vernon, mocking the manner and speech of the elder. "An' what was it thee visited on me when thee forbade me thy house? Insults! Egad! Is it forbidden for a man to damn iniquity or toast a lass? Who dare tell me that thy lovely daughter should not——"

"Young man," interrupted the Quaker, his temper showing in the flush that overspread his face, "were it not for my faith I fairly think I would lay violent hands on thee! What manner of man can thee be to drag the name of a lady into a public house? Out upon thee, sir! Thy respected father would be outraged, thy mother shocked at thy speech, which is both seditious and insulting. Thee are a servant of His Majesty's," he continued, turning to the officer (who, evidently realizing the condition of his companion, had ceased to appear aggressive), "and if thee be a friend of Clarence Vernon, curb him or remove his offensive person."

"Nay, then!" said the intoxicated youth, picking up the sword before him, drawing the blade, and swinging it over his head in drunken bravado, "there is no man in the colonies nor out of them that can put me from this room. I tell thee, Bran-

Betsy Ross

don, that if ye lay hands on me we cross swords. Go yer way if ye list, but let me alone; I will have it out with Broadbrim. I tell thee, thou smooth-backed woolgatherer," he continued violently, indicating the elderly Quaker by the point of his sword, "I tell thee that thee can not pull the wool over the eyes of Clarence Vernon. I am a Whig, and proud I am. Thee are a damned Tory and a pirate at heart. I know—I know—but thy girls are Whigs and angels, and, devil take me! little of Quakers save in name. As to Bessy I will not swear, but by Clarissa——"

The sentence was never finished. The young man by the fire had only expressed his interest in the scene by turning his attention from the flames to the excited youth, and had listened quietly, as any respectable person may listen to the brawling and mouthings of a drunkard, wondering less at the substance of his words than at the vagaries of a misguided brain. But at the names he leaped to his feet, and, approaching the youth, clapped him forcibly on the shoulder.

"Avast there, Mr. Vernon! I know you only by sight, but I tell you you must not speak those names here; and so I warn you!"

Vernon turned and closely scrutinized the man who had interrupted him. The mood which had changed so rapidly from surliness to bravado and carelessness of conduct leaped into active anger as his uncertain eye met the steady look of the young man who had accosted him. With the drunkard's

The Bag o' Nails

quick change of mood and subject his anger rose to fury as his attention was directed to this new quarter. For the moment he was but a madman as he shouted with dramatic fervor :

“An upstart, by the gods! An interloper, by the dragon! Sirrah, hast no fear of consequences? Dost forget Hamlet's address to the arras? Dost play the rat? Have at ye, sir—stand back!”

And with this he cleared from the heavy chair he had been straddling, threw himself into a fencer's posture, and made a pass at the young fellow before him. The lunge would undoubtedly have been successful had it not been for the quickness of the intended victim. Seizing the vacated chair, he lifted it in time to receive the point of the sword in the oaken seat, and then bearing forward, forced his assailant back. Though Vernon in his sober moments might have been skillful enough with his weapon—indeed his attitude instinctively taken speaking well for his training—in his present condition he was in no shape to resist a vigorous assault. The point of the rapier would not at once withdraw from the wood into which it had been driven, and his head was too muddled with liquor and self-made excitement to care well for his heels. The result was that he backed rapidly into the bench that ran along the wainscot, seating himself with such violence that his teeth clashed, the jar causing the lights to flash before his eyes as though he had received a hard blow on the head, the shock doing much to alter his temper. Before he could gather

Betsy Ross

his scattered wits his opponent was upon him. Grasping the sword, he hurled it across the room, and seizing the bewildered young man by his rich lace collar, he shook him as he said :

“I care not if ye be the son of Judge Vernon or the Prince of Wales himself, but I know ye to be a great ass for the present. If ye value your good looks, or the opinion of decent folks, ye will get out of here, and if ye are not of my opinion ye will act as though ye were! Now go!”

The action of the assault and the defense had been so sudden that those in the room had no chance to take part, *pro* or *con*. However, as the apparent sailor jerked Vernon to his feet, the young officer, who had uttered no word during the brawl, came forward, and, with an air half-superior, half-condescending, spoke sharply :

“I will take care of my friend, sir; you have more than done your part. Are you a gentleman from whom he may demand satisfaction? You have openly insulted Mr. Vernon.”

“Have I, indeed?” returned the young man, with a careless smile, as he dropped his hold on the fast-collapsing figure of the party in question. “Well, ’tis an unfortunate name for well-merited punishment; and just now, if you are, indeed, his friend, it behooves you to look after his well-being instead of his honor.”

“Sir!” returned the officer, flushing with anger at both the manner and words of the other, “I have

The Bag o' Nails

little liking for the tone you adopt. Who are you? Where can you be found?"

"I am not an idiot, at all events," was the retort. "However, do not think I wish to conceal my identity, my scarlet friend. My name is known. I am Joseph Ashburn, supercargo in the West India trade on board the ship *Salvator*, now in the *Delaware*. And what satisfaction is desired?"

"Sir, you know what I mean!"

"Aye, I dare say!" said the sailor, snapping his fingers in the face of the soldier, and raising his voice menacingly as his brows gathered in an ugly manner over his dark eyes; "but, as I am satisfied, I care little or nothing for your feelings in the matter. However, if it would give you satisfaction to be thrown through the window ahead of your friend, who has insulted two ladies, I shall be happy to oblige."

The officer made no reply, and the two stood gazing at each other, the soldier as if studying the generous height and breadth of his opponent, a size much more apparent as he stood than when in a semi-recumbent position he rested on the settle; the sailor, as though awaiting an answer before beginning action. There was defiance in the looks of the young men as they thus faced each other, and violence might have ensued had it not been for both the landlord and the Quaker entering their protests, the former with the cry of "Gentlemen, gentlemen, do not brawl here; I beg of you each to

Betsy Ross

have a care!" while the latter turned sharply on the officer—

"Young sir, are thee aware of the risk thee incurs by defending that young man after his treasonable utterances? I am sorry to see one in His Majesty's livery take a position contrary to his oath. To what regiment does thee belong?"

The youthful officer looked at the stern face and marked the dignified bearing of the old man, and his pot-valiant temper possibly cooled at the thought of what might be the consequences of a formal complaint lodged against him. That he was newly fledged as a soldier was apparent both in the glitter and freshness of his arms and his uniform, and the evident pride he had in his calling as shown in his bearing. But he doubtless had sense enough to respect the elderly Quaker and his possible influence, for he answered with a lowered crest:

"I am of the Sixteenth Dragoons, but lately arrived. My friend was only drunk and foolish; he meant nothing."

"Drunk, surely; and foolish, probably," was the answer; "but thy excuse is small. Thee dost not know, as I do, that he holds these sentiments in his sober hours, and 'tis truly for this that I have forbade him my house as I would forbid any traitor to His Majesty. My children shall have nothing of such society. Thee knows him but slightly, I fancy."

"He belongs to a fine family. I had letters to

The Bag o' Nails

his mother, a stanch adherent to the king, sir. I have known him a week or more."

"So long, indeed!" answered the Quaker, with a grim smile. "Thee has much to learn, my young friend. Thee may have heard that when the wine is in the wit is out. I advise thee to take thy foolish friend home, and I further advise thee to say nothing of this to his mother; and last, I advise thee to carefully pick thy company. Philadelphia is not the godly city it once was, and temptation is common. Young man, I am Samuel Griscom. Did thee know me better thee would take my advice somewhat hurriedly if thee valued thy well-being."

The last words were uttered with a look that carried conviction with it. It was evidently sufficient to cow any remaining spirit of resistance on the part of the boyish officer, for without more than a wondering glance at the grim face of the Quaker he picked up his friend's sword and crossed to where Vernon sat in growing stupidity on the bench to which he had sunk when released by the supercargo. Taking him by the arm, partly lifting and partly dragging him, he led him to the door, which at that moment opened, admitting a newcomer, who, with a dark eye and quick, furtive gaze, looked at the two, stepped aside to let them pass, and closed the door behind them.

CHAPTER II

A DISCIPLE OF NEMESIS

THE devil sometimes stalks on earth in the guise of a saint, but in the person of the stranger he walked into the taproom of the Bag o' Nails, in face at least, not far removed in appearance from his commonly accepted physiognomy. The man who entered the room was not so much amiss in his countenance as to be displeasing to the average person, but his black and shifty eye seemed to possess all the attributes of the Evil One and to dominate his entire person. His manner, moreover, was no disguise, for the air of politeness with which he endeavored to clothe himself was too forced to be born of gentility. His rolling gait and general carriage (though not his gorgeous dress) told as plain as speech that his calling was the sea. This was made certain by his weather-beaten skin, the tattoo marks on his hairy hands, his queue incased in an oiled eelskin, and a general flavor of brine and bilge water that seemed to be wafted from him, and which his gaudy costume could no more hide than can clouds conceal the presence of the sun. He wore a full beard of inky blackness, and his tobacco-stained fangs were more than suggested

A Disciple of Nemesis

when he laughed. And when he laughed he was most to be feared.

With a quick look about him he pulled off a richly gilt hat in deference to the assembled company, bowed with grave humility, and crossed the room to where the fire was roaring up the chimney. With a long breath of relief, such as one may give on reaching his destination, he threw himself into a chair, drew up another on which he placed feet covered with fine morocco high boots, laid upon the table two heavy pistols with carved butts which he pulled from his belt, and, after considerable fumbling in the depths of the pockets of his baggy velvet breeches, put beside them a sheathed dagger with its hilt richly jeweled. This was not from a spirit of ostentation only, but for relief, and appeared as natural as was the custom of unhooking and laying aside, while sitting, the universal sword.

That the man was out of place in the taproom of the Bag o' Nails was as plain as the look of wonderment that came over the face of the host as he watched the stranger's movements, and that he either was or had been a pirate was apparent at a glance.

But in the year of 1773, piracy, under the euphemistic name of South-Sea trading, although as a business was fast going out of fashion, was far from dead. And, moreover, it was known that men of standing and probity in both church and community still had many of their good "pounds sterling" in-

Betsy Ross

vested in these ventures. Nevertheless, the morals of society had so far advanced that profits arising from such investments were not bragged of abroad, and the finger of derision was already being pointed at those suspected of dealing in goods obtained in the South-Sea trade. And to the community the fault seemed (as it undoubtedly was) greater in the promoters of these ventures than in those who carried them to a successful termination, though these latter came more sharply under the law.

Therefore the stranger was looked upon more in wonder than in displeasure; a man to be feared more from his personality than disliked for his calling, if, indeed, he was what he seemed. His dress, slightly foreign in effect and decidedly rich, was not greatly beyond the prevailing fashion, save in the breeches, though his taste in selection had been barbarous. His arms, though peculiar, were hardly to be criticised in those days when men went through life openly armed against their fellows, and the ever-ready rapier was always at hip or elbow.

With a voice in which politeness was the letter and command the spirit, the stranger ordered a bottle of rum and a churchwarden (or long pipe) of the landlord, who, hardly knowing what to make of his customer, had stood still and speechless, instead of giving the ready welcome for which he was noted. During the momentary absence of the host the few now in the room looked in silence at this, to them no less than interloper, and with a nod of adieu to Griscom, who had remained standing as he watched

A Disciple of Nemesis

the newcomer with no small interest, his two companions silently withdrew, leaving in the room the Quaker, the young supercargo, and the piratical stranger.

As the rum and pipe were placed before him, the sailor swung his head a trifle over his shoulder and, directing his words to the youth, said :

“Lad, I like yer looks. Ye seem a for’ard chap ; join me in a dram, will ’e?” The young man who had reseated himself on the settle after looking at the Dutch clock which swung its spindle pendulum between the windows, glanced up quickly at being addressed. In the face of the stranger there was no trace of the geniality the words warranted, but instead a heavy frown, which seemed to be habitual, gathered on his forehead. Either from motives of tact, or for other reasons of his own, the supercargo did not care to run counter to the wishes of the sailor, and he shifted his seat from the settle to a chair by the table. He had but done so when his would-be entertainer drew in his legs, looked about the room as if to scan the number of its occupants, then settling back and gazing into the fire, he said, sharply and without moving :

“*Samuel Griscom!*”

If the Quaker had spied a snake at his feet he could not have started more suddenly than at the sound of his name as uttered, but if surprise overtook him then, by his face consternation followed as he advanced to the fire and met the full stare of the man who had called him. He stammered

Betsy Ross

inarticulately, and then, somewhat feebly for one of his strength and presence, he ejaculated:

“Joe—Joseph Bradley!”

“Nay, then! Is yer memory shortening with the lengthening o’ yer years?” returned the other, with an increase of his scowl. “Have ye not gotten the name mixed, Friend Griscom? Did ye not know that Joe Bradley was dead? Faith, I would have ye to understand that my name is Joel Radley, an’ I think ye will admit ye stand corrected!”

“Whatever may be thy name, thy face is that of an old acquaintance,” replied the Quaker, recovering himself; “and it is years since I have either seen or thought of thee.”

“’Tis twenty years since I have clapped eyes on my old employer,” replied the sailor, looking soberly and fixedly at the Quaker, as he filled the vast bowl of his pipe with tobacco.

“Yea, yea!” rejoined the Quaker, hurriedly, “I did employ thee once, I remember; but since that day, Friend Bradley—ah—a—Radley, I have found the getting of wealth but a vanity; I have ceased to be more than a mere tradesman, I have put the old life behind me, and am only a humble dealer in wool.”

“Aye! say ye so?” returned the sailor, forking an ember from the fire and lighting his pipe; “an’ was it godliness that took ye from New York to this place where ye were less known? What may be yer real line at this bilin’? Take ye a chair—

A Disciple of Nemesis

take ye a chair and sit ye down, I ha' much to say to ye."

"What can thee have with me, Joseph Bradley—I mean Friend Radlêy?" asked the Quaker, sinking into the chair which had been indicated by a kick, his air being that of one who, though forced, would appear to be doing a favor. "It can be little, I trow. Twenty years must have——"

"Twenty years be damned!" exclaimed the other, cutting him short. "Does ye think a cat is ever aught but a cat? List a bit. I have been looking for ye for three months, an' I have found ye. I heerd in New York ye had turned Quaker, an' I pricked ye here by dead reckonin'. I have been up to your house an' they told me where I might lay han's on ye, that ye were goin' to meetin' soon an' would not be back, an' as I had to see ye I came here, an' I knowed ye the second I cocked eye on ye. Ye wear drab now, Friend Samuel, but ye had better ha' stuck to silk an' velvet." And with his coarse hand the sailor smoothed the rich cloth on his thigh. "It was to ask ye one question," he continued, bending slightly forward and glowering at the Quaker: "Did—ye—ever—get—yer—share—o'—the—booty—o'—that—v'y'ge?"

The Quaker was evidently embarrassed. He turned red, cleared his throat, looked quickly at the young man who sat opposite, drew himself up, and answered:

"Yea, Friend; I received a fair return from the profits of the trade. It was but an investment."

Betsy Ross

"Ye did, did ye? Ye received a fair profit, did ye? An' how many years ago since ye received such fair profits?" asked the sailor, in a mocking tone.

"Some sixteen years ago. There is nothing I desire to withhold from thee, Friend, but my time has ended. It is as thee was told; I must go to meeting. I will be glad to see thee at some other time."

"Hold hard!" exclaimed the sailor, as the Quaker made a movement as though to rise. "Sit ye down ag'in. So ye wants to get from me easy; go slow. Now ye tell me one thing more, for if ye got yer plunder ye seen Kettle."

The Quaker had turned red at the reference to the receipt of moneys years before, but at the implied question as to a man named Kettle he became as pale as a corpse, and looked at the person before him as though he would read his soul before making answer. The gaze was as steadily returned, and for a moment neither moved. But the sailor's patience was becoming taxed by the delay and the evident embarrassment of the Quaker. Putting his pipe from his mouth, he growled out a deep "Well?"

"I can not tell thee a lie, Bradley," said the old man, slowly. "I saw him."

"An' does he still live?"

"Yea, he still lives."

"Yea, he still lives!" said the sailor, mockingly, while a flash seemed to dart from his black

A Disciple of Nemesis

eyes as he bent forward and grasped the Quaker by the lapel of his coat. "Praise be to the devil! Where is he?"

The Quaker sprang to his feet, shaking off the younger man as easily as though he was a child.

"Bradley, thee be a villain! Young, sir," he said excitedly, turning to the silent supercargo who sat twisting a glass of untasted rum on the smooth top of the table as he listened with growing interest to the conversation, "I call on thee to defend me against this man. Years ago I was a wild youth, but I have reformed and have reformed others to a godly life. I fear this fellow, for he would force from me the whereabouts of a defenseless brother in the Lord, who once, to save himself, punished this unholy person. It is his old captain he seeks. He wishes to kill him; 'tis on his face. I refuse further converse with him. Thee has shown thy manliness to me this day and I have faith that thee will bear me witness that I have neither threatened him nor done him harm. He may do his worst on me."

The sailor threw himself back, looked toward Ashburn and smiled, and his smile was a revelation. Its repulsiveness was appalling. The lips parting made a rent in his face, but no sign of mirth was in either mouth or eyes. As the black cavern extended and a hoarse chuckle resembling a snort came forth, it was seen that the upper jaw was toothless save for two enormous canine tusks, black with tobacco, which seemed to hang out like

Betsy Ross

the fangs of a rattlesnake about to strike. There was the very devil in his expression, and, in spite of his undoubted courage, the young man shrank back at the malevolence of the transformed countenance before him.

“An’ d’ye know, lad,” said the sailor, bringing his face back to its normal condition, “it was for fear o’ him yonder that I got ye to come to my side ere I called him. S’help me! but I thought Sam Griscom would make some foul move when he found Joe Bradley was yet alive. Lad, he was ekle to it in days agone. I was fairly unsartain which would make the other walk the plank. So he’s mended his ways, has he? An’ so have I, lad; so have I. I make a clean breast of it. Once I was in the South-Sea trade, but I’m a swivel out o’ use now. Slavin’ is better in the long run; profits fair an’ no risk. I’m reformed an’ in the wool business, too, Friend Samuel—black wool—ho—ho—ho! black wool; on my blood ’tis a good joke; ho—ho—ho! Here’s to the life inside the law!”

He laughed aloud, flashing his snaky eyes from Griscom to Ashburn, then filling a glass top level with rum he drank it off in a couple of gulps, and again addressed the Quaker.

“Samuel, let there be no war between thee and me. Samuel, I fear thee in that dress worse than in the days when ye wore yer arms outside. I promise to do ye no harm, neither will I damn ye from one end o’ the town to the other as I might do, Samuel. But I would see Kettle. I would see

A Disciple of Nemesis

my dear old captain an' have a trifle o' converse with him. Samuel, I be richer than ye by many pounds, for all your gatherings. I would turn Quaker, too, Samuel, save that I'd make a poor fist o' lyin' with a smooth face, an' I would die like a rotten sheep if I left the brine."

Here the sailor rose to his feet and looked about the room. The place, save for our trio, was deserted, the landlord having gone to the kitchen. The speaker was terribly in earnest as he towered over the Quaker. He shook his fist in the air. His voice, though lowered to a strident whisper, seemed to thunder as he slowly said:

"But, Samuel, I will have the blood o' Kettle. I care not for the booty, an' 'tis like that ye got a share o' my share, *but I must an' will see Kettle*. He made me suffer the pangs o' hell in this world an' I'll send him to suffer them in the next."

He stopped abruptly and sat down. The Quaker was visibly affected.

"And will thee not spare this man?" he finally asked, in an agitated voice.

"Nay, I will not."

"Then must I invoke the law upon thee?"

"What's 'invoke'? Invoke an' be damned! Ye may invoke yerself into irons, or worse. Think ye I am alone in this, Friend Samuel? I fancy ye had better protect me than invoke, as ye calls it."

The Quaker showed no excitement, no resentment, no fear, but answered quietly, "I shall warn

Betsy Ross

him of his danger, and thee may wreak thy vengeance on me if thee will. I see my duty."

"So warn him, if ye list," was the reply. "But without asking, ye have answered the one question I was fain to put to ye. I know now that Kettle is in Philadelphia. Go yer way, Samuel; go yer way."

Samuel Griscom had made a slip, and the astute Quaker rarely made slips. Whatever had been his youth, it is fair to believe that his reform had been sincere and had progressed as far as to permit his life to run level with the lives of most men who are subjected to the influence of the world and the flesh if not of the devil. The idea of violence shocked him, and his eyes were open to the fact that recrimination is rarely justice. He arose in righteous indignation at the idea of vengeance on the part of the ex-pirate, and though the man called Kettle might have warranted all ill feeling, he had resolved to save him. Not by invoking the law, as he had threatened, for that would have been his own ruin, and he had not yet risen to the height of self-sacrifice, but by warning the intended victim of his danger. That he was yet worldly-minded and knew the influence of wealth, and, under a humble exterior, yearned for it, is not to be doubted. Whatever might have been the foundations of his present fortune, it is certain that his present gains were legitimate enough, and it was then the custom (as it is now) to let the dead past bury its dead and judge of a man by his doings of to-day.

A Disciple of Nemesis

Although Bradley had boasted of gains which might or might not have been imaginary, the Quaker saw, and saw truly, that a plaster of guineas was the best medium for a wound of anything but the flesh, and often soothes even physical ills, and that to warn the intended victim and bribe the would-be murderer was the safest way to a quiet ending of the whole matter. It might perhaps be a heavy sacrifice of money—he was but reaping as he had sown—but it involved no sacrifice of the pride of this pillar of the Church of Friends, this exponent of Meekness and Humility.

These things flashed through the old man's brain even before the sailor had finished speaking, and by the time the latter had settled himself and was pouring out another glass of rum, the Quaker had risen to his feet, as if availing himself of the permission to be gone, and said :

“Bradley, will thee withhold from violence until thee see me again? Will thee come to my house to-morrow at this hour? I have much to say that may be agreeable to thee, but now I must go.”

“Would ye buy me off?” asked the other with swift instinct, a devilish twinkle dancing in his black eyes, not now noticeable, for the sun had dropped behind the horizon and the room was beginning to grow somber. “Aye! well, I will be there sharp. Have yer say ready.”

The Quaker made no reply, but started for the door, though, as on an afterthought, he turned about

Betsy Ross

and addressed the youth who still sat at the table. He had suddenly remembered that silence was a marketable commodity.

"Young sir, did I not understand thy name to be Ashburn and of the ship Salvator, now in the river?"

"You are right, Mr. Griscom," said the youth, rising to his feet out of respect to his elder.

"Then thee must be related to her owner, Mistress Nellie Ashburn. Is it not so?"

"The same, sir. I am her nephew," returned the young man frankly.

"Ah! then I am glad to be indebted to thee. Mistress Ashburn is as shrewd a business woman as the times know. And thee be supercargo? Verily, thee must know that I have goods aboard. When does thee sail? Soon, I understand."

"I am, of course, aware of your invoice, sir. As for sailing, we hope to get out on the first of the ebb to-morrow evening. Will you—will you——"

"Will I what, my son?"

"Will you kindly bid adieu to your daughter—your daughters. I have a—a passing acquaintance."

The Quaker knit his brows and as quickly relaxed them. He pursed his lips and looked hard at the young man as an idea struck him and caught his fancy.

"Will thee not call and bid them adieu to-night, Friend Ashburn? Thee has earned the right by defending them."

A Disciple of Nemesis

The blood bounded to the young man's face, but the light that suddenly illuminated his handsome countenance fell in the next instant.

"Nay, sir; my duty is with my aunt to-night. We go over our last business. To-morrow I will be at leisure; may I not call then?"

The Quaker hesitated and cast a look at the sailor, who was now paying more attention to his pipe and bottle than to aught else. Then it came to him that it might be well to have a diversion for his family at the time of Bradley's call, and a strong arm in the house might also be useful. Therefore it was with genuine heartiness that he said:

"Of a surety, sir; of a surety. Clarissa may be at Meeting—she is devout; but Betsy will entertain thee until her return. And I would speak with thee also on a private matter."

The young man bowed his acknowledgments and, as the door closed behind the Quaker, he glanced at the clock which just then jerked out five rapid strokes, and, without saying anything to disturb the seeming reverie of the slaver who sat looking into the fire, slowly sucking his pipe, he picked up his portmanteau and went out, leaving the darkening room to the darker fancies of the man calling himself Radley.

CHAPTER III

MISTRESS NELLIE ASHBURN

MISTRESS NELLIE ASHBURN, spinster, sat alone in her drawing-room. This was not the name she gave it; to her it was the "general utility room," and the most comfortable room in the house, for all that it possessed the elegant simplicity of the colonial style. The single clerk she employed to attend her at home had gone for the day, leaving the lady to herself and her reflections, which, to judge by her face, were fair enough, although there was no animation about the lines of her pleasant mouth, and the few wrinkles in her forehead might have been exaggerated by the cross light of the fire before which she was sitting. On the small table at her side lay a pile of guineas, together with a pair of silver-bowed spectacles, a brass bell, a piece of tatting such as with which the women of the time amused their idle moments, and a pair of mitts of dark blue silk. A brightly polished copper candlestick with lighted candle gave some help to the dying fire in illuminating the room, bringing out the paneling of the high, white enameled wainscoting and the low beading about the severely plain chimney-piece. A file of bills lay at her feet and

Mistress Nellie Ashburn

also a pile of books similar to that she held, and between herself and the fire sat an immense cat looking into the depths of the dwindling flame as intently as though studying the problem of a possible tenth life.

With the same intentness, or it might have been with a mind lost to its present surroundings, the lady gazed also. Her hands, small and still plump, lay loosely folded; her head was thrown easily against the long and slender dowels of her high-backed chair, and her prim side curls, the high knot at the back of her head, and the higher tortoiseshell comb, which was intended to ornament it, lost something of their severity as the hair also lost something of its silver in the uncertain light. Her black dress, plaited over the rather flat bosom, was of the richest and heaviest silk, as it must have been to properly offset the exquisite bit of lace that encircled her somewhat thin neck, and which was mercilessly fastened flat in order to show its fine pattern and worth against the dark ground. Her nose was generous, her eyes dark, usually snappy, but now, in the firelight, and with her present mood, the eyes of this astute business woman were wonderfully soft. It was the eve of Miss Nellie Ashburn's forty-fifth birthday in an age when an unmarried woman was called an old maid at twenty-six. She was a little person, and had undoubtedly been well favored, for she was yet a pretty woman, with the prettiness of the autumn leaf, with the tart attractiveness of a frost-bitten apple.

Betsy Ross

Presently she looked up, nodded once or twice, puckered her lips into an involuntary smile, and then came to herself. With a flouncing of her skirt, followed by its smoothing, she sat erect, directed her attention to the cat, and exclaimed:

“Snoopy, they’ve got to do it! I’ll make ’em!”

Then, with a quick, pecklike movement, she struck the bell that stood on the table. In a moment a diminutive negro boy in fantastic livery opened the door. He found his mistress sitting stiff-backed and straight with her hands rigidly crossed. She did not turn her head.

“Scipio Africanus!”

“Yessum.” The boy seemed to cower beneath the weight of the name.

“Has Mr. Joseph come in yet?”

“Nome.”

“What, ye imp?” The spinster spun about and faced him.

“No, *marm!*” answered the slave, catching himself and saluting with a quick motion of his hand toward his head while he shifted from one foot to the other.

“Much better, Scipio,” said the lady. “I expect you’ll be worth your salt some day; but if ye don’t improve faster I’ll have to sell ye for the price of old hemp—you, who should be worth two hundred pounds at your age.”

The answer to this was a brief “Yessum,” and a wild rolling of the whites of the monkey’s great eyes.

Mistress Nellie Ashburn

"Scipio!"

"Yessum."

"The fire needs a log. Where are your wits?"

With the usual "Yessum" the darky hastened forward. When the log had been deposited the spinster spoke sharply:

"Ye need drilling. Go to the door, sir, then turn about and face me."

The negro obeyed.

"Heels together! Why did God give a nigger such heels? Hands down!—that's right. Look me in the eye and answer me promptly or I'll skin ye. Did any one call while I was aboard the Salvator?"

"Yessum." The negro lapsed into vacancy.

"Who, ye black imp?" said the spinster irritably. "Have I to pump ye like a leaking ship? I went aboard to give last instructions at ten o'clock. Now who has been here since?"

"Yessum. Miss Clarissa Griscom."

"*What?*"

"*Marm*," added the boy, hurriedly.

"Good Lord! will I never train ye? Clarissa Griscom, indeed! What did she want?"

"Nothin', *marm*."

"Well she got it if she only saw you. May God give me patience! What did she *say*?"

"She said, marm, 'Give this to Mr. Joseph 'thout tellin' nobody, an' here's sixpence.' That's all, marm. I gave it to him—'deed I did—when he come in to dinner."

"Gave him what, ye small idjit?"

Betsy Ross

"Somepin writ on a paper."

"A note? A letter?"

"Yessum."

"Is that all?"

"Yessum."

"Get out of my sight and tell me the moment Mr. Joseph comes."

"Yessum." There was a short interval of silence, during which the diminutive negro made no movement to obey the order. Instead, after an uncertain catching of breath and shifting of feet, he broke out:

"Miss Nellie!"

"What is it, Scipio?"

"Mars Joseph done come. I heerd him."

"Aye, Aunt Nellie! I 'just done come,'" interrupted Joseph Ashburn, as he picked up the darky by the scruff of the neck and deposited him outside the room. The young man then crossed the floor, bent over the little woman, and saluted her on the forehead with a deference marked even for those somewhat formal and chivalrous days. Unbuckling his sword or cutlass, he deposited it in a corner, then drew a chair to the fire, and held out his palms to the strengthening blaze. The lady looked at him fondly as he sat, then said:

"I thought you were to meet me on the Salvator, Joseph. I waited long for you."

"I am sorry, aunt, but I was detained by a matter which I thought might be to your interest."

"Where, Joseph?"

Mistress Nellie Ashburn

"At the Bag o' Nails. I met the captain of the Fair Virginia."

"The slaver anchored above the Salvator?"

"The same. I wished to find out when he sailed and where bound. I have doubts of the Fair Virginia being altogether what she seems—an honest slaver."

"And did you find out?" asked the lady, sharpening her tones as her interest deepened. "You kept me waiting in my chair so long, near the Friends' Meetinghouse on the hill, that I was well-nigh frozen, and had to beg Sexton Ketch for live coals for my foot warmer. You should know your man's history by this."

"He has been a pirate," was the brief reply.

"Well, the Lord be with ye till ye get hull down. If he sails not before, I care little. The Bag o' Nails must be a bag o' news! Who was there?"

"Well, Mr. Griscom, and young Vernon, and——"

"Young Clarence Vernon, indeed! Half drunk, as usual?"

"Wholly drunk, aunt. Fairly foolish. I had to protect Griscom from his insults. I little thought him a Whig."

"His father is—but tell it not in Gath!"

"Why?"

"Because my old friend—God forgive me—his wife, Dell Vernon, is *not* a Whig, but the rankest fool of a Royalist a body ever knew. Her tongue is as long as my arm and works harder. Did ye ever

Betsy Ross

hear of two big words called 'domestic infelicity,' Joseph?"

"Aye."

"Then I've said enough. There would be small charity in bruiting about a thing the judge dares not tell his own wife. If the lad has one point with which to redeem himself, God be praised. His Whigism may be the reason he refused the king's commission when his mother had all but obtained it. My—my, but the woman is Xantippe for all her fine airs over her wealth and family."

The youth made no return to this.

Again silence fell—so complete, indeed, that the purring of the cat could be heard between the snap-pings of the log and the low moan outside, which latter told of a rising wind. In the meantime the lady looked hard at the young man as he sat wool-gathering. She had cleared her voice two or three times, clasped and unclasped her fingers, smoothed her silk skirt over her knees, and finally, after having apparently arrived at a certain pitch, she spoke with determination:

"Joseph, is all your luggage aboard? See that ye be on time, for to-day I told Captain Dacre to sail at six sharp, whether you are aboard or not. I don't purpose to have the ship stuck on the bar again for any one."

Ashburn looked up quickly. At six! That was about the hour he would be leaving the Gris-coms'. He would rather miss the ship than his appointment.

Mistress Nellie Ashburn

"If I should be late, aunt, I can hire a boat and overtake her in the river. Have no fear."

"You will be drowned yet with the chances you take, Joseph. Then what account of my care will I give to the ghost of my dead brother when he comes to me inquiring for his son?"

There was an unusual tenderness in her voice as she paused, but ere her nephew could make a reply to this speech, half-affectionate, half-reproachful, she continued:

"Ah, Joseph, you are too much away from me! I shall miss you sorely, and fear I have not done my whole duty by you. You have served a sufficient apprenticeship—this shall be your last voyage; I will make you my manager."

Ashburn swung about, looked fixedly at his aunt, the bloom on whose cherry cheeks was increased by the fire, and rising, took one of her plump-mitted hands in his, and bowing low, pressed it to his lips.

During the silence that ensued it was evident that the lady had not unburdened herself, for after this small episode, though the glances she gave the young man were as fond as before, there was the former air of uncertainty and hesitation, the same clasping and unclasping of the hands, smoothing of the heavy skirt, tapping of the small black silk slipper, and various signs denoting feminine impatience. Finally it came.

"Joseph."

"Yes, Aunt Nellie."

Betsy Ross

"I told you this would be your last voyage. Do you know why?"

"Out of your kindness and goodness of——"

"Oh, fudge!" interrupted the lady. "*It is because I am going to marry you, Joseph!*"

"Good God!"

The young man sprang to his feet as though a shot had been fired at him.

"Aunt Nellie, are you mad? Marry me? *Marry me?*" He stood petrified.

The lady looked frightened in turn. She glared at the astounded youth a moment, and then, throwing both hands above her head, broke into a paroxysm of laughter.

"She has suddenly gone insane!" was the articulate thought of the man as he stepped toward his aunt, looking keenly at her the while, consternation written all over him. He bent to take her hands, but she waved him away, and placing them over her stiff bodice, gave even a wider scope to her mirth.

There was active alarm on her nephew's face as he turned to the table. He was about to strike the bell and summon assistance when his aunt frustrated his design by picking it up and holding it from him, while peal after peal of free laughter rang through the spacious room. Gradually her attempts at self-control increased, and finally, after a great effort, she regained her voice and something of her old manner.

"Faith, Joseph Ashburn, dost think I am a fool? Have I lived forty-four years that I must at last propose myself to a baby? God forgive thee

Mistress Nellie Ashburn

thy wits, child! I mean not myself—and what a zany ye looked as ye leaped from the chair! O Lord!”

And again she fell into such a shake of laughter that for a moment she could not continue.

The attitude and face of her nephew were far from being heroic, and the good lady was hard put to keep herself from breaking down when she spoke again.

“But, Joseph, I meant just what I said. I am going to marry ye. Are you willing?”

“I was indeed an ass, Aunt Nellie. You came so like a white squall on me, and I—I was dreaming.”

“When young men and maidens dream, Joseph Ashburn, they are generally in love.”

For an answer, the young man, who had regained something of his natural color and ease of action after his self-denunciation, drew his chair to his aunt’s side, and taking one of her hands in his, said very soberly:

“Aunt Nellie, do you mean you wish me to settle down? You make me bold. I *am* in love. I am more; perhaps I have been wrong in keeping it from you, but I am already engaged to be married.”

CHAPTER IV

A WOMAN'S WAY

MISTRESS NELLIE ASHBURN, like a great many individuals, wished to have her own way so long as there was opposition to overcome. On being met by immediate acquiescence to her plans she was apt to at once turn lukewarm, or shift her desire in a manner to bring about a conflict of opinion that she might taste the sweets of triumph. And with her peculiar temper (consisting largely of an ability to show her teeth and bark), her wealth, position, sex, and a general adaptability to circumstances, together with a manner as forcible as her words, she was usually victor in any matter in which she desired to convince or to conduct. She had openly expressed a wish that her nephew should marry. She had expected opposition, of course, for the young man had never hinted that his affections had been touched, and the filial demonstration he had shown her since his babyhood was all in the way of love she suspected him of having a knowledge.

Therefore his abrupt confession, though apropos of the subject, was almost as much of a shock to her as, in a different way, had been her implied intention to him. She snatched away her hand, tossed her

A Woman's Way

head, and bridled as she turned her face from him. With a remarkable exhibition of her peculiar gift at coming at once to the point, she said, half to herself and half, apparently, to the cat, to which she seemed to address her words:

"Bless my soul! It's a woman!"

"Well, aunt, you could hardly expect it to be a man."

"Hold your tongue, sir! Who is she?"

"She's an angel!"

"Fudge—*fudge*, Joseph Ashburn."

"Don't poke fun at me, Aunt Nellie, for I am very much in earnest. She is the most marvelously accomplished little woman in these colonies—and the sweetest. I am serious."

"Well—ain't I? Dear me—go on; I ain't jealous."

The small foot was tapping the polished floor somewhat too rapidly not to belie the last assertion. And between the agitation, the firelight, and perhaps a revival of something that had lain dormant within her for many years, Mistress Nellie Ashburn was almost as handsome as on that day, twenty-five winters before, when Edward Ross brought the blushes to her cheeks, and, being too great a fool not to know that a girl's teasing is but a bid for more affection, went off in a huff and married her worst enemy—and died. Why, at that moment, did she think of Edward Ross, dead, and his son John, still living? and who, at that moment, like a false note in concerted music, was hastening along the

Betsy Ross

now stormy street bound for the mansion of Mistress Nellie Ashburn.

Something there was that softened her, for she made no resistance as her nephew again took the hand she had snatched from him, but she did not vouchsafe to turn her face. He knew nothing of the wonderful tenderness of her eyes, which more than offset the impatient, half-defiant expression to the mouth, already beginning to give way before the assault of memory.

"And, aunt, she loves me so——"

Mistress Ashburn came back to the present with a jerk. She was weakening too rapidly.

"Oh, she does! That's an accomplishment, truly. How long have ye been giving lessons?"

"*That* is no accomplishment, it comes natural," said the youth gayly. "But she *is* accomplished. She paints like an artist. As for needlework, there's not a woman in the colony who can compare with her. Just see the stitches she knows!"

The young man—God bless a lover!—was deep in his theme. He dropped the spinster's hand, and upon his own outstretched fingers began enumerating:

"There's the satin stitch, quince stitch, tent stitch, cross-stitch, openwork, tambour, embroidery for curtains and chairs, and—oh! everything and anything!"

His aunt switched about and faced him, while upon her countenance was a look intended to be witheringly sarcastic.

A Woman's Way

"H'm! How extremely edifying and instructive your talks with your divinity must have been, with its stitches and its stitches. Is it not high time I knew the name of this piece of perfection?"

The young man blushed furiously as he recognized the childishness of his enthusiasm. He hesitated a moment before answering.

"You know her, Aunt Nellie."

The good lady tossed her head and flounced around.

"Oh, yes! I know her. And indeed I *do* know her! Do ye think I carry my eyes in my pocket? When young ladies—very demure, of course, being Quakers—call at the homes of young gentlemen and leave notes—three-cornered and scented, I'll lay my life. What are the times coming to? Oh, yes, of course—merely a matter of business, you will say. Ye probably think I will need about three hundred guesses to know who ye mean. Clarissa Griscom, indeed, the trollop! I'll have none of her, Joseph Ashburn. A rank Royalist, because her father is—a mouthing Quakeress. A proud minx, who—who—who——"

Mistress Ashburn became almost incoherent as she reached this point, and paused. The youth smiled quietly, and said:

"Well, aunt?"

"Who is deceiving you—*that's what*, Joseph Ashburn!" continued the lady, with increasing excitement. "A girl of poor taste—*that's what*, Joseph Ashburn. I think she would rather flirt—

Betsy Ross

Quaker though she is—with Clarence Vernon than marry you. You have no business to think of her. If she had only the good sense of her younger sister, if you had only the good sense to fall in love with Betsy, I should have felt different. What could have possessed you? I thought you had at least as much sense as John Ross, who would give his two ears to marry Betsy. I should think you could have seen how superior Betsy is, if you *must* fall in love with a Quaker. I suppose——”

The young man sank upon his knee and placed one hand upon the spinster's shoulder.

“Aunt Nellie, it is Betsy.”

The lady looked confused.

“What's Betsy?”

“I mean that Betsy Griscom is the woman I have chosen; the girl I love—to whom I am betrothed.”

If Joseph Ashburn had expected to calm troubled waters by this statement or explanation, he was mistaken.

“I declare, Joseph, you are much too bad. I don't see why you take pleasure in leading me astray in this manner, and deliberately making me suppose you had fallen in love with Clarissa Griscom. I won't say but that she is a nice enough girl and will make somebody a good wife, but how comes it that you receive notes from Clarissa when you declare for her sister?”

“My dear Aunt Nellie, it was from Betsy can-

A Woman's Way

celing an appointment for this afternoon. That was all."

"That was all, was it? Well, I don't see why you led me such a dance—and—I don't see how you could have guessed."

"Guessed what?"

The lady suddenly softened.

"Guessed that it was the wish of my heart. I have been planning it for weeks. Do you know what it means to forestall a woman in a match-making scheme? But I'll forgive you. I'm glad you have come to your senses. There be but few that can stand out against me, and even you, Joseph, would have to come to my way of thinking about this matter."

The uncertain look on the young man's face gradually cleared away, and he was all but radiant, when at her last words she bounced from her chair, threw her arms about his neck, and gave him a hearty and wholesome kiss on either cheek. At this, the youth's emotion well-nigh conquered him. His bliss was at its height. His last and greatest obstacle had been removed, and perhaps at that moment, that supreme moment when the sky seemed cloudless, Joseph Ashburn's nature was softer than it had ever been, even in childhood—than it would ever be again. Forgetting conventionality, he laid his lips against the yet blooming cheek of his aunt, and in the silence that ensued the lady plainly read the gratitude that passed from his heart to her's. "Come, sir," she said, "you

Betsy Ross

have the letters to my agents at St. Kitts and Porto Rico—aye? Well, here are two hundred guineas, your salary prepaid—the last you will receive from me as a supercargo.” The lady swept the gold from the table, and continued: “I shall have to alter the house a little, and ye shall—O Lord! who is that, I wonder, and at this of all times in the world?”

The hall knocker had sounded sharply—sharply, because even its muffled strokes were discordant, breaking, as they did, the mellow mood holding both aunt and nephew, and discordant, perhaps, because they were the herald of something which, like a distant rumble of thunder, spoke of a rising though yet unseen storm. Neither was there an indication of coming trouble when the small darky, now in his ceremonial element, threw open the door, and in the musical voice of his race piped out:

“Miss Nellie, Mars’ John Ross done come.”

The young man who presently entered the room, and found Mistress Ashburn alone, could not have selected a more inopportune time to call on that lady. The interruption of itself was irritating enough, but when to her great astonishment she found that the errand of Mr. Ross was to beg for her intercession in his behalf, through her to urge his suit with the girl who had given her heart to her own nephew, she was at first unable to express herself. While she admitted her influence over her *protégé*, she absolutely refused to woo Betsy Griscom for him or for any one. She closed the interview with characteristic abruptness as she said:

A Woman's Way

“ John Ross, you are the son of my old friend, so I'll not laugh at you as you deserve to be laughed at. Listen, young man. It may be wise to set a thief to catch a thief, but to set a woman to catch a woman, as you wish to have me catch Betsy Griscom, is worse than foolish. Take your ' No ' for an answer, John, and bear it like a man. Vicarious love is washy stuff ; Betsy would have none of it, and I wouldn't blame her. She is not for you, anyway—she is going to marry Joseph Ashburn.”

CHAPTER V

ON BANK HILL

THE Bank Hill Meetinghouse, one of the many nuclei of Quakerdom, stood on Front Street, near Arch. Tradition has it that it was a one-story brick building, set a few feet above the level of the roadway, an elevation that was not apparent on the afternoon of December 27, 1773, for the snow that had fallen the night before—the night of the advent of John Ross into the house of Mistress Ashburn—had filled all depressions and leveled off the face of the earth, even as death levels rank. The gables and shutters of the building had that immaculate yet austere cleanliness of paint peculiar to houses of worship in general and Quaker meetinghouses in particular, though the plain Doric doorway, with its white pillar on either side, gave an air of architectural “effort” to the otherwise severe building. Perhaps the most absolutely frivolous ornament was the twisted and intricately designed iron lamp bracket, which from the corner of the edifice supported its yet unlighted lantern.

The view commanded from the height on which stood the building was lovely—more than lovely, even in the bitter chill of the late afternoon. The

On Bank Hill

growing city seemed to have respected the lonely dignity of the meetinghouse and had spread away from it, leaving it in an opening, and from this generous vantage the eye swept north and south as well as east and west. At the foot of the hill flowed the Delaware, its black surface smooth as oil in the weakening light. The distant houses in Camden, small, and soft in outline against the peculiar blue cast of the banked snow, threw back the strong glow from the west. The far-off woods had turned purple, and the sky taken on the steely glitter known only at evening when the air is still and the mercury low in its tube.

The glory of the spot, however, lay neither in the view nor the building, nor yet in the sanctity of the latter, but in a magnificent oak tree that stood a pistol shot from the meetinghouse, and held its leafless branches aloft as though to show the strength of its limbs in all their black nakedness, standing alone like an athlete, apart from weaklings, superb. About its immense bole was built a rustic seat, and the windswept woodwork showed the polish of long usage. The few horses fastened to the hitching pole behind the meetinghouse indicated services within, though no murmur of a voice gave evidence that the spirit was moving.

But for the watchman who had entered the little square, the place seemed deserted by humanity. The small gleam from his pierced tin lantern looked but a dancing will-o'-the-wisp in the strong afterglow, and barely threw the bearer's shadow on the

Betsy Ross

snow that creaked dryly under his weight. A portly man was Lemuel Bass, and as generous in temper as in girth. With an appreciative glance at the extended prospect, he advanced to the steps of the meetinghouse, and placing his lantern thereon he deposited his staff beside it, and proceeded to lustily swing his short arms that he might regain the feeling that had fled from his fingers.

At that moment the door of the meetinghouse opened and the sexton stepped out. He was bare-headed—an old man with darkened features, a rugged, weather-beaten neck, bushy black eyebrows, and an eye that possessed the depth and ferocity of a hawk's. A long red scar, extending from his right ear to the cheek bone, rendered sinister the appearance of that side of his face, though a thick crop of snowy hair somewhat softened the general asperity of his countenance. His dress was ultra in its Quaker simplicity. The empty sleeve of his long, drab coat disclosed the fact that the sexton's right arm was missing, while the rounding of his shoulders and a tremulous bending of his knees told of years and a weakened constitution. His voice, in keeping with this appearance of general feebleness, seemed to give the lie to his almost saturnine face.

"Ah, ha! Friend Ketch, 'tis jest a leetle bit airsome this evenin'," said the watchman in a hearty voice.

"Aye, aye, a trifle so, a trifle so, Friend Bass," was the answer in a tremulous treble.

On Bank Hill

The watchman rubbed his hands and nodded his ponderous head toward the meetinghouse, through the half-open door of which he could fairly see the interior, with the hatted males drawn up on one side and the women—few in number—against the opposite wall.

“The meetin’ is like to dissy-line a few o’ those warlike speerits that’s writin’ pamphlets an’ talkin’ fight an’ opposition to King George to-night, I hear.”

“Thee seems well informed. I may not deny what thee sayeth,” was the noncommittal reply.

“Well, as fer me,” said the watchman, “I know not what to think. Sometimes ’tis one way, sometimes t’other.” He picked up his lantern, hung it on his staff, and took a step. “Ye hain’t seen my good woman pass this way, hev ye?” he asked, stopping short.

“Nay.”

The watchman replaced his lantern and settled his legs as though he had found a topic the discussion of which would arouse no opposition or question.

“There’s a woman fer ye!” he exclaimed protestingly. “No peace nor happiness fer her ’less she’s doin’ a good turn fer somethin’ or somebody; ministerin’ to the sick, helpin’ the distressed.”

“A blessed spirit, Friend Bass!” was the pious reply.

“Yes, but Lord bless ye, there’s no keepin’ track of her. Ef she’d set up a fondlin’ ’sylum or a

Betsy Ross

horse-spittle, or sunthin', I'd know where to look fer her, but now she'll be anywheres betwixt this an' Germantown at a minnit's notice, an' me a-guessin' where."

The sexton did not rise to the watchman's enthusiasm. He made no reply, but appeared to be looking into space. In the silence that ensued, and while Lemuel Bass rubbed his hands and cudgeled his brain to find a topic that might serve to hold him in communication with a fellow-being, clear on the crisp air came the sound of oars working in their rowlocks, and the tinkling splash of water. The small, almost bell-like sound seemed to arouse the sexton.

"Lord, Lord, what a glorious night!" he exclaimed softly, though with rhapsodic fervor. "It has the quiet of a tomb. Hark! How plainly thee can hear yonder stroke!"

"Aye, it carries well," said the watchman, as he craned his head around the corner of the building. "It is probably the boat from the slaver; I marked one making for the landing below."

"A slaver, does thee say?" asked the sexton, with a show of interest.

"Aye, the middle vessel yonder; I know naught of rigs. The one below her is the Salvator, belongin' to Mistress Ashburn."

"Ah! I know her, I know her," returned the sexton warmly. "A noble soul! She never forgets me at the new year. Aye, a shrewd woman. A fair ship and full-rigged from keelson to——"

On Bank Hill

"Ha! thee seems to know sea tarms, Friend Ketch. I suspicioned ye o' havin' been on blue water. Step here an' tell me o' the different rigs. There's the slaver, an' the Salvator below her, and above lies the packet what's bound fer Liverpool. Thee can see her ropes an' spars agin the east like as though she was penciled on the sky, but I know not her name. I hear that the three sail to-night on the ebb. Queer, hay! Now, what might thee call the slaver, hay?"

"I know not, Friend Bass, I know not," answered the sexton hurriedly. "I but came out for a breath, and the cold begins to strike me. I will bid thee good-night."

And with considerable abruptness the old man turned into the building, closing the door behind him.

For all his appearing superficial, Mr. Lemuel Bass was a thinker; not on the subject of his own shortcomings, for he was fairly well satisfied with himself, but on the shortcomings of others. He guided himself by the original saying: "A true horse will run true every time; if he don't, look fer the reason." He applied this to mankind, using the sentiment backward: "If a feller runs crooked *at all*, sunthin' is back on't, find the reason."

Though the watchman was not a great mathematician, he had the happy faculty of being able to put two and two together in a hurry, though he was not always satisfied with the result of his figures. As he picked up his lantern and staff he

Betsy Ross

looked hard at the closed door of the meetinghouse, shook his head, took a step or two, stopped, bit his thumb, and moved off.

"I give it up!" he exclaimed aloud; "but he shied, bad! It'll come; it'll come!" And dismissing for the present the subject of his thought, started to meet the single man who appeared to have come from the landing behind the meeting-house.

There was no mistaking the oncomer's identity, for even in the dim light the flashiness of his garments and his rolling gait proclaimed him the master of the Fair Virginia. He appeared much the same as when he had made his advent into the Bag o' Nails. Now he carried a huge ship's lantern, the sperm-oil lamp of which was not yet kindled. The watchman flashed his light into the bearded face and greeted him:

"How now, captain? Ashore ag'in? 'Ware the troopship!"

"Hello, old Anchor Watch! One eye open, eh? Wot's the troopship to me?" was the careless reply.

"The press gang is like to be out, that's what. Lord help the poor feller caught in lickor on Front Street to-night. I hear the troopship's short-handed."

"Damn the troopship! Small luck she'll have with the press. I'm on that tack myself. Where away does old Quaker Griscom hail from here? I'm out o' bearin's."

"Griscom!" said Bass, eyeing the man sus-

On Bank Hill

piciously. "An' what want ye with Samuel Griscom?"

"Nawthin'—damn yer curiosity. Were ye on my deck I'd flay ye for the question—but he wants me."

"Well, 'tis no business o' mine, an' that's God's truth," returned the watchman, walking away; but wheeling about, he continued: "Ye scarce deserve an answer. Ye can have his house in yer eye from yer deck. Mark ye that high white gable to the brick building? Aye; well, that's not it; 'tis the one next, with the wall about it. I would ye had the luck yer civility calls fer."

And the watchman rubbed his cold and stubby chin with his colder hand as he saw the captain of the slaver disappear in the fast-gathering dusk. Then he turned down the hill toward the landing, that he might have a look at the villainous crew which had brought the ex-pirate to his appointment with the Quaker.

CHAPTER VI

THE RED CLOAK

IT was unfortunate, perhaps, that the loquacious watchman had found two persons in the square, both of whom had, to a degree, aroused his suspicions. He was somewhat philosophical and cogitative, and the food given him for thought made him slightly careless in going his habitual rounds. Had Lemuel Bass been a trifle more alert, or had he followed his usual custom of stepping to his favorite oak, sitting down and filling his pipe with the careless ease known to the old-time watchman, he might have noticed the single track of a man who had left the road and waded through the snow to the tree, and undoubtedly he would have come in contact with the individual who sat upon the wind-swept bench under it in seeming disregard of the increasing cold. The watchman might have altered the lives of many people, certainly prevented the misery of four, but had no idea of his lost opportunities as he wended his way to the boat landing.

He was following the well-trodden path when a distant clock struck the hour, the sweet, slow notes beating along the silent and chilly air like the throbbing of a pulse. Mechanically Lemuel Bass picked

The Red Cloak

up the last stroke and sent his mellow voice after the lost vibrations: "Five o'clock, and all's well!"

The young man behind the tree heard it, kicked his heels together, took from his pocket a silver-mounted flask and applied it to his lips, keeping it there so long that he must have absorbed well-nigh a half pint of the liquor it contained. With a glance in the direction of the meetinghouse, followed by a muttered and impatient curse, he pulled up the broad collar of his fashionable double-caped coat, and, jamming his hands into his deep pockets, vented his ill-nature by doubly damning the hilt of his sword, which in some way had become caught in the cloth.

He was not to have his patience taxed for long, however. He had seen the captain of the slaver disappear in the gate of the low wall surrounding Samuel Griscom's house, and now he saw it reopen, this time to let out a shadowy form, though not so shadowy and uncertain but he at once recognized it. The young man became all animation, the knowledge that his watch was over, acting with the large dram he had taken, serving to give a flush to his somewhat dissipated face. He approached the advancing figure directly, and halted in the narrow, snowy path.

"Clarissa!"

"Mr. Vernon!"

The lady stopped, and looked rather more agitated than was warranted by merely meeting a friend.

Betsy Ross

"Is it 'Mister' Vernon?" said the youth, advancing his hand to take hers. "Why not Clarence, as usual? Why are you thus formal?"

"Thee surely are at no loss to fathom the reason, sir," was the spirited reply, though the blue eyes that flashed from the tunnel of the little Quaker bonnet made the pretty face more attractive. "Does thee think I have no feelings to be considered, or that, being a humble Friend, I have no pride? Nay, sir; for the man who brings my name into a tavern bar I can have nothing but formality. My father has told me all that happened. Let me pass thee, sir!"

The young man did not comply at once, and with a quick movement the lady put one foot in the deep snow bounding the path, and ere he was aware Clarence Vernon found he had been flanked, and that the lady was beyond him. Turning, he caught up to the young girl, for young she certainly was, her activity as well as her face, litheness of form, and peculiar vibrant quality of voice, proclaiming it. A poor figure the young man cut as he trotted behind her, the path being but wide enough for one, and the object of his pursuit hastening in a way that made his progress less dignified and his speech less impressive than was common to the usually self-contained aristocrat.

"Now, Clarissa, my darling, let me ex—explain."

Clarissa Griscom's heart beat rapidly, and her soft pink cheek took on a deeper tint as she heard

The Red Cloak

his term of endearment; but her voice and manner remained unchanged; her blue eye flashed none the less as she slightly turned her head and answered as she walked:

"No, no, Mr. Vernon, thee can not explain. I am truly ashamed for thee——"

"I am ashamed of myself f'r that matter," returned the young man as he hurried along; "but stop an' listen to me a moment, won't you? I was beastly intoxicated, Clarissa, I was, an' so——"

"Nay, I will not talk to thee, Mr. Vernon. Thee be still under the influence of liquor. With proper respect to myself, I should never speak to thee again."

"Don't be unreasonable, Clarissa; don't talk that way."

They had come to a spot near the tree where the path widened. The young girl turned about and faced him, and her blue eyes were pathetic with the mingling of pleading, love, and anger.

"What have I not risked for thee already?" she asked as she held up her hand to warn him off. "I have over me my father's certain displeasure, for he likes thee not, and that of the Friends, should we even now be discovered. And how am I rewarded? My father may come to meeting at any minute and see me talking with thee—or my sister—or some one. I am late; I must go."

"Go where?" asked the youth abruptly, ignoring her expressed desire and catching her by the cloak.

Betsy Ross

"To meeting," was her hesitating answer as she cast down her eyes.

For it was not for that purpose she had left the house. Ever since her father had told her of the episode at the Bag o' Nails, Clarissa Griscom had felt very much as though her heart had been broken. With the disposition of a gentle child and the passions of a woman, with a proper pride fighting against what she feared was a misplaced affection, during the day she was at war with herself. She knew as well as though she had seen him that Clarence Vernon was beneath the oak awaiting her coming, and the heat of the house became unbearable. So did her internal conflict. So did the society of her younger sister, Betsy, who, with a quiet content that was exasperating, continued her knitting by the fire, with barely a pause, the pink on her cheeks fluctuating as she sat there, perhaps from the play of the flames, perhaps from her thoughts.

Clarissa Griscom's character was not cast in heroic lines, or it might have been that her passions were stronger than were those of most women of her age. At all events, she could not withstand the pull that drew her toward her lover—just to see him and teach him a lesson, she told herself—and had the young man met her in a spirit of deep contrition, deeper than he showed, or had she not at the onset discovered the fumes of liquor on his breath, and noticed its effect in both his manner and speech, it might have come about that all disagreements had ended there; that the girl would have

The Red Cloak

incurred all risks; that the recreant lover would have been received as are most recreant lovers—with more fondness and forgiveness than they deserve.

But upon the maiden declaring that she was about to enter the meeting, the half-suspicion born of jealousy (without some of which there is no love), leaped to the cloudy brain of the young man as he seized her by the long and enveloping cloak she wore.

“*You* goin’ to meetin’!” he exclaimed hotly. “You are *not*! You are deceivin’ me, Clarissa Griscom! Dost think I am a fool to be beguiled? You never intended to go to meetin’ in this!”

The girl gasped as, for the first time, she noticed the color of her garment. It was a bright red, its hue, warm against the snow, as gay as the cut was unconventional.

“Dost think to fool with me?” continued the young man, fast losing his temper. “You tell me you are goin’ to where you know you will not be allowed to enter. Lucky am I, my lady, that I chanced upon you now! Whose happiness have I interrupted? Let me but find him, and he may beware o’ me. Oh, damn him, I say! Give me his name!”

“Mr. Vernon, let go of my cloak!”

The girl spoke quietly, yet so forcibly that Vernon dropped the wrap and looked at her stupidly.

“Sir,” she continued, “thee have insulted me openly. Thee shall neither break my heart nor my

Betsy Ross

pride. The business I came on thee shall never know, but the cloak was but an accident. It belongs to my sister Elizabeth; I took it by mistake. Thee have no right to even this explanation. I have no more to say."

And with a half-courtesy and a choking little sob Clarissa Griscom turned her back on her lover and hurried into the meetinghouse.

CHAPTER VII

VERNON'S CRISIS

THERE is a time in the life of every man when the seed of his spirituality pierces the crust of his daily sins and comes forth to be recognized, by himself if by none other. And whether or not it withers for lack of tending, or whether it strikes root and flourishes, depends upon the wind of circumstances which sweeps over it while it is young. In a strong character it is likely to live; in a weak one it is apt to fall on the first assault against it, perhaps never to start afresh.

Clarence Vernon was not a bad youth, fundamentally. Had his father, Judge Vernon, holding office under the king's commission, been a man of more force, or his mother a woman of less, or of a will more pliable or a head possessing the gift of tact, the young man might not have been driven elsewhere for the entertainment he should have found at home. It may have been his father's lukewarmness to the colonial cause, or his mother's intense opposition to it, that made him espouse (perhaps from sheer obstinacy) the plebeian party—so-called. It may have been the flattery bestowed on him for his bravery by certain members of the

Betsy Ross

same party that caused him to lose his head and gradually his tone. Like Mistress Ashburn, he seemed to seek opposition for the sheer pleasure of doing something to test his strength, but, unlike the lady, it was rarely for a moral object. He lived on caste, and his rank was dear to him; but, as he got deeper into the mire of politics, his aristocratic friends deserted him, and in the same measure he deserted his own better nature and took to drinking deeply. This latter alone was no great sin in those days, but its effects were the same then as now; it blunted his morals, and he was regretfully conscious of their weakening. What remained of them had been held above the flood of his dissipation by his love—his one true sentiment—for Clarissa Griscom.

As the young girl turned from him and hastened away he heard the stifled sob. Its sound, too genuine to be doubted, laid for a moment the ghost of his jealousy, and at the same instant his good angel struggled to the surface. He was not so far gone in liquor but he was coherent to himself, and with an instant and full realization that the young lady was trying to save her love and her pride together, he experienced a revulsion of feeling such as he had never known; and standing in the snow like a man of stone, he read himself a sermon the like of which he would not have tolerated an instant from another quarter. He not only realized what he had done and said then and the day before, but realized its cause. He saw now, and soberly, for

Vernon's Crisis

the cold had helped to steady him, that her father's opposition was as nothing—that a woman who loved was well-nigh invincible as against restraining circumstances. He hung his head in contrition, and muttered :

“ I deserve it, but I will atone—I will make amends. Even though I freeze, I will wait for her to come out, and I will humble myself.”

And, driving his hands into his pockets, he turned toward the oak, for under its boughs the wind of the night before had made bare of snow some few paces of frozen ground. At the action his right hand struck the flask, and with a quick movement born of impulse he drew it from his pocket and hurled it far down the hill. As the flask vanished from view he exclaimed :

“ May I be doubly damned if I drink more ! I will never touch liquor again, so help me God ! ” He held his clinched fist toward the sky and shook it as he spoke, as though the action gave strength to his oath. He walked the bare ground a turn or two, then seated himself on the rustic bench, leaned his head against the tree, and gave rein to a train of pleasant thoughts. The seed of his spirit had sprouted.

Half an hour later the moon, but just past its full, came over the Jersey hills. The snow doubled its glory. The stars shrunk from it. It made a crisp glittering path across the Delaware, and shot brilliant sparks from the salient points of the ships below. Through the still air drifted the sound of cap-

Betsy Ross

stan pawls and clanking as, link by link, the chains of three anchors were hove short. The moon put a diamond on each wet link, tipped the few snow wreaths on the oak by the meetinghouse, and, looking beneath the great branches, brought out the pale face of a sleeping man.

CHAPTER VIII

BETSY KEEPS TRYST

CLARISSA GRISCOM, in order to make good the statement of her intention, softly opened the door of the meetinghouse. Within, the few candles then lighted gave scant illumination, and nothing but the girl's outline could be distinguished by the few who, diverted by the opening of the door, looked up. Like a flash she whipped her gaudy cloak from her shoulders, but she was far too slow for the sexton who kept the door, and from whose black eye nothing escaped. With an exclamation of horror, none the less effective because subdued, he arose from his bench and hurriedly approached the girl as though to save her from observation, and taking her by the arm urged her behind the tall screen that served to at once break the draught and, in the summer season, protect the interior of the house from impudent curiosity from without.

"Art thee mad?" he exclaimed in a low, menacing whisper. "Thee can not enter here, Mistress Griscom. Hast thee sunk so low as to bedeck thyself in this gaudy rag? God forgive thee, child! It is of the color of blood. Dost thy father know?"

"Nay, nay, Friend," returned the girl in a

Betsy Ross

piteous whisper. "It was a mistake. I knew it not. I meant not to come hither, and only wish thee to protect me for a moment. My father knows nothing of it. The cloak is not mine. Let me sit here."

"Protection from what?" asked the sexton, severely, as with his hand on her arm he detained her from sinking onto the bench. "What menace drives thee to the house of God in such a color? What would harm thee?"

The girl's brain worked quickly, as it must need, for the eyes of the sexton were upon her—eyes that had little of meekness and small charity in their depths. It would never do for her to admit the truth, as, word for word, she was aware, her answer would be repeated to her father, and bitter would be the consequences were it known that she had even as much as spoken to such a moral and religious outlaw as Mr. Clarence Vernon. Whatever Samuel Griscom might have lacked in the spirit of the law, he was firm enough in the letter.

But his daughter's ready invention was equal to the occasion. She had seen the ex-pirate enter her father's private room, having herself announced him, and the face of the unusual visitor had, in spite of her own trouble, given her a sense of a sinister something the nature of which she failed to either comprehend or probe.

"It was a man I feared, Friend Ketch. Indeed, I would not do myself the outrage to wear this thing from preference, much less bring it here with-

Betsy keeps Tryst

out cause. Thee may be quite gentle with me. I will go on the instant he has passed."

"A man pursue thee!" said the sexton in wonderment, bending over her as she sank to the seat and bringing his lips to her ear. "What manner of man? I will see!" And he turned softly toward the door only to be held back by the skirts of his long coat.

"Nay, he will be gone," said the maiden, fearful of exposure. "He is gone by this. A black-bearded man who was shortly with my father—the captain of the slave ship below. I know him, and—and—I was without, and I feared him!"

"Nevertheless, thee must leave this place, and at once!" was the return, in a strident whisper. "I will be thy guard to thy father's. If I did my duty I would denounce thee."

There was no help for it, and the next instant the young girl and the sexton stood in the snow. The moon had not yet lifted above the horizon, else they might have seen the figure of Clarence Vernon, who at that instant, with his face toward the river, was registering his vow, not dreaming it was yet time to look for his beloved.

Without speaking, Clarissa and her protector proceeded on their way, a short walk bringing them to the gate in the wall. As the maiden turned to leave him with a "I thank thee, Friend Ketch," the sexton stood still, and finally, with strange abruptness and without preface, spoke:

"The captain of the slaver, thee said?"

Betsy Ross

"Aye, Friend Ketch."

"And with thy father, Samuel Griscom?"

"Aye."

"Whither has he gone?"

"I know not, Friend."

"Thee knows not his name?"

"Aye, Friend Ketch, he gave me his name. It was—Badly—or, oh! yes, Joel Radley. I feared him, Friend. He is a godless man. Thee will take cold, and I would not have thee suffer for thy kindness. Good-night!" And again turning, the girl entered the house.

For a space the sexton appeared to be paralyzed in every limb, for without a quiver of a muscle, even that of an eyelid, he stood and gazed into the white space before him. Several minutes elapsed ere he betrayed signs of animation, but finally his single hand went to his hat, which he removed, and, turning his scarred features to the stars, now plentiful and glistening, he ejaculated with the deepest fervor:

"This is the burden that for hours has been upon me. It is Thy will. Share with me Thy strength and Thy humility, for my need is great!"

And with a figure less bent than when he had come forth from the Bank Hill Meetinghouse, Friend Thomas Ketch strode back to his post with a new light shining in his dark eye.

As Clarissa entered the house and passed toward her room she met her sister in the hall.

"Thee art going out?" she said interrogatively.

Betsy keeps Tryst

"Aye, for a short walk before evening meeting. I will be back soon. Ah! thee is the one who had it. I could find it nowhere."

"Find what, Bessy?"

"My cloak, child. 'Tis gaudy, but 'tis warm, and father is too busy with his visitor to mark either my going or coming."

"Bessy, dear," returned Clarissa, "I would advise thee to burn the cloak. It has well-nigh gotten me into trouble—I, who took it by mistake. What may it not do for thee, who wear it openly? It is an unholy and violent color."

"Tut, tut, Classy! I can not forever endure formality!" returned her sister with a smile. "I fear me I am but a poor Friend, though, honestly, I feel no less a Christian."

"And would thee even love and marry out of Meeting, Bessy?" asked her sister, with a look of earnest inquiry on her sweet face.

"That would I!" was the answer, accompanied with a deep blush, fortunately hidden in the depths of the quilted hood, which, though conforming in general shape, had little in common with the prim Quaker headgear of her sister. "Aye, and glory in it as—as I glory in the whole of God's works, Classy. His tones are not all drab," continued Betsy, as she took the red cloak from her sister, threw it over her shoulders, and drew on a pair of thick red mittens fur-trimmed around the wrists. "We are both deceivers. I hate deceit! Aye, Classy, in all honesty, I should not grieve to be

Betsy Ross

read out of Meeting for loving one not in it. I would still be in and of God's world! Good-by, child."

Betsy Griscom was not pretty as was her elder sister. She resembled Clarissa in many ways, but in her case prettiness was lost in beauty, as was the mere sweetness of disposition in her sister lost in character in herself. They were both of them of a size, however, petite and lithe; and of the same voice, sweet and girlish; and both were possessed of a wholesomeness born of love, pure spirits, and health undefiled by dissipation. In face each was a foil for the other, for, whereas Clarissa's eyes were blue and as straightforward as a child's, with a trifle of the child's open wonderment in them, and her hair was so light that it might be termed blonde, Betsy was dark beside her. There was a depth in her brown eyes lacking in the blue; a certain delicate transparency to the skin not like the cream and roses of her sister's cheek, and her brown hair was almost black in shadow and almost red in sunlight. The firmness of her sweet mouth and rounded chin gave her an appearance of strength of purpose that was lacking in her sister, but the true tenderness of the woman reigned on the brows of both.

As Betsy Griscom turned into Front Street the moon was just rising. The glory of it lighted the landscape with the cold brilliancy peculiar to winter nights, strengthening the picture by the accentuation of intensely black shadows, and softening

Betsy keeps Tryst

roughness and harsh outlines with a touch unequaled. The long-sunken sun had left a faint coppery glow on the western horizon, and the dash of warmth in the otherwise universal chilliness of color was charming. The distances were clear and interminable.

It was a night on which men pause on their thresholds, wonder at the beauty of the world, and long for a vague something. It is a whisper of the spirit, perhaps. A night when voices carry far; when mysterious creaks and snappings are heard in windless woods, and when the silence of wide fields becomes unbearable, and yet their very nakedness invites to awful solitude. A heavenly night, so called.

The impressionable nature of Betsy Griscom felt its influence as she passed in front of the meetinghouse and marked the moon lift from the distant hills. There was no hesitation in her steps. She walked as if for a purpose, and for a purpose it was. She noticed the faint lights in the building—lights rendered fainter by the moon's intensity—but she, too, failed to see the figure of Vernon, who, betwixt the influence of cold, the after-effect of liquor, and the quiet of the night, was already in a doze.

The girl hastened along the way, deserted of all signs of life, until in the distance she detected the figure of a man apparently in much more of a hurry than was she. Instinctively she stopped beneath a tree, and in a moment more was in the embrace of her lover. She had kept the tryst.

Betsy Ross

"Joseph, thee be late!" she asserted when she could regain her breath.

"Aye, a trifle. But thee can not say much thyself," returned the man, using the Quaker term that sounded so quaint and so endearing. "I saw thee when thee was but a hurrying speck in the distance. But I seem to be mistaken!" he continued, holding her from him, looking into her lovely face and letting his eye rove over the red cloak and pretty hood. "Methought I was to meet a meek little Quakeress—a drab cedar bird—and here I have the queen of all fairies—a warm little woman of the world!"

"Indeed, Joseph, it was because Clarissa had the cloak that I was late. For our last meeting I wished to greet thee in something less somber than drab. O Joseph, I would but deck myself for thee! It is not from vanity, though I am but a poor backsliding Quaker, I fear. I do not believe in their tolerance of abuse. I do not believe in turning the other cheek forever and forever."

"Aye, love, but let us not talk of creed; I have matter more to our mutual interest. Thee are like a rose in the snow as thee stands there. Betsy—I have told my aunt."

He paused. The girl suddenly bent her head, as though accused and awaiting sentence. He placed his gloved hand beneath her chin, and lifting her face, brought the brown eyes to his own. "And she approves," he continued softly.

The girl's face was radiant with a beauty given

Betsy keeps Tryst

only to man to enjoy. "And now we have naught to fear but father."

"And I think I may in time guarantee thy father also," said the young man mysteriously. "He invited me to his house to-night, and told me you would entertain me."

"Oh, wonderful! What magic does thee possess? And thee will go?"

"Nay, my time is too short. I should be aboard even now—my luggage has gone long since. We will keep this our last tryst, for this is to be my last voyage. My aunt has said so."

Tears of joy and emotion welled from the eyes of the maiden. "She is the best of women," said the girl. "It really seems that Mr. Shakespeare is to be wrong for once when he said, 'The course of true love never did run smooth.'"

"You are not yet wholly mine," was the somewhat depressed answer.

"Oh, but I am thine! What but death could part us now? A few weeks and you will return, never to leave me, unless—unless you go to the fight that is like to come."

"And I may have to fight about something as dear to me as my country. I have a rival that must be disposed of."

The girl turned her face upward, and between the quick flush and merry though subdued laugh she was irresistible.

"Thee means John Ross. A good soul, but, oh, so stupid, Joseph! He has so pestered me that I

Betsy Ross

am fain to tell him how hopeless is his poor case, only I dare not. He has been child enough to go to my father for his intercession, but small encouragement he found. I think, Joseph, I could never marry a Quaker or a man like John Ross. I believe I am willful and wicked."

"Thank heaven for thy wickedness, then. I should hate to marry perfection and suffer by contrast. But thy John Ross visited my aunt last night, and I left them together. To her he pleaded for thy love as though she could command it at will. I think she set him right, for he seemed a melancholy young man when he went out. God knows that I wish I had no more to fear than that he will get thee. I am not jealous."

"Jealous of him, indeed!" said the young girl in fine scorn. "He even now takes too much of our time; short as it is, his name is too long. Let us walk, love; I am chilled."

CHAPTER IX

THE CURSE OF THE RED CLOAK

THE lovers wandered slowly up the hill toward the meetinghouse, the man's arm about the maiden's waist. They had entered the portals of heaven which only opens to the magic word of love—a foretaste of the future, perhaps, and certainly the state nearest heaven that God permits on earth. Their talk was of the kind that in centuries past and in those to come has never lost and will never lose its novelty, nor pall. Together they halted near the tree, but beyond its shadow, and the moment of parting had come. The pleasures of a lover's melancholy possessed them both—their pauses were most eloquent.

“Hark! there—I hear the boat going up the davits; they think I am not coming,” said Ashburn, as clear to the ears of both came the rattle of blocks from the ship nearest them.

“And thee must go?”

“Aye, love. And go thou and place the light in the window as thee promised. I shall hire of a boatman below, and know at each stroke that thy thoughts are of me.”

Betsy Ross

“And Joseph, wave the lantern from the deck. Oh, I hate to leave thee—I hate to leave thee!”

The agony of her love caused the maiden to raise her voice, and at the words Mr. Clarence Vernon, behind the huge gnarled trunk of the oak, awoke.

The young man had been asleep barely ten minutes, yet he was benumbed with the cold. His brain, however, was clear, and his ears sharp. He had heard human voices, and instinctively he listened ere he moved, for moving at that moment was no easy matter for him.

“Oh, my love! God guard thee and keep thee true, even as I have been true, forever!” whispered the maiden, and putting back the folds of her cloak she threw her arms about her lover’s neck and kissed him.

“Go, my darling, it is getting late for me!” said the young man hoarsely. “I will wait here until I see your light burns, then I must hurry. I will wave a lantern from the deck as soon as I get aboard. God bless thee, my sweet!”

The girl bent in silence, pressed her soft lips to his hand, and hurried away.

By this time the young man behind the tree had straightened his cramped limbs and shifted himself that he might see the actors of the love drama being played so close to him, for every word uttered had been as clear as though whispered in his own ear. In effect, for a moment, he was a decrepit old man as he pulled himself along the bench, by far too interested to give a thought to the stiffness that

The Curse of the Red Cloak

bound him, and at which, under different circumstances, he would have cursed. The mood that had held him was still upon him, and the words he had overheard were in keeping with the new softness of his nature. He managed to pull himself to his feet and get a view beyond the immense bole of the oak just at the moment that Betsy threw her arms about her lover's neck. The pair were scarce ten paces from the hidden man, and he saw the flash of her white flesh in the moonlight as her sleeve fell back and exposed a few inches of her rounded arm. The brilliant light brought out the blood-red color of the cloak even as the silent air brought out the voice he loved so well, and to the astonished eyes and ears of Clarence Vernon there was Clarissa Griscom exchanging vows with a man the identity of whom he did not at once discover, for the broad back was toward him, even hiding the face of the girl.

Vernon stood motionless and watched the couple in their last embrace. He saw and felt the absolute devotion expressed in the bowed head as Betsy kissed her lover's hand and hastened away. He saw his supposed rival standing as though in a rapture as the girl disappeared, and without moving he still waited until he saw from the high window a light flash out.

The agony of the young man was intense; his impotent anger and lacerated pride were too great to allow him to be articulate, even to himself. The fresh green sprout of his better nature disappeared

Betsy Ross

in an instant; his good angel fled, for Clarence Vernon was little better than a lunatic as he stood there silently and nervously disengaging the hilt of his sword from the folds of his cloak while his teeth were set and his eyes glowed with ferocity.

There, too, stood the unconscious and worshipping Ashburn until he marked the light appear; then he raised his hand and exclaimed, half to himself and half aloud:

"Heaven bless her! She is my star!" and turned away.

Before he could take a step, however, Vernon was upon him. The sound of the sentiment had unlocked his muscles and let loose his dammed-up passions at once. Short as had been the time between his awakening and that moment, it had been sufficient for him to have lived a year of torture, and the single idea he possessed was that of revenge on the man who had thwarted him, however innocently. Such is the logic of hate.

Plowing through the deep snow, he came upon Ashburn just as the latter turned to go, and, cutting him across the face with the glove he had drawn from his hand, he whispered fiercely:

"But she shall never shine for you, you buzzard! What!" he exclaimed, starting back, as in the broad light he caught sight of the face of the man before him. "By God, we are well met! Can it be you who——"

"Sir," said Ashburn quietly, as he passed his hand over his face, "if I did not know you were

The Curse of the Red Cloak

laboring under a mistake I would thrash you as you deserve."

"Mistake! you hog of the sea!" vociferated Vernon, whipping his sword from its sheath and throwing off his greatcoat. "Mistake, to me, you cur! Have I not eyes and ears? That deceitful wench swore she loved me with all her heart and soul, until you—damn you—stepped in. If you have the bowels of a chicken, draw and defend yourself, for, by God, here you pay!"

Ashburn looked wonderstruck at the man. He could not comprehend that he was in danger until he saw his opponent's sword flash from its sheath; then, as though for protection, he laid his hand upon the hilt of his own weapon.

"You are crazy!" he said, utterly at a loss to otherwise account for the fury of the attack.

"Not half so crazy as you are cowardly, you thieving dog! Aye, now I see why you played at heroics before her father yesterday at the Bag o' Nails! You had me at a disadvantage, but now I have you!"

"Have a care, sir," returned Ashburn, a dark flush coming over his face—a veritable flag of danger. "Have a care! I am putting a restraint on myself because, sir, I know there is some mistake—or do you seek to have me make amends for my action of yesterday?"

"Mistakes, and actions, and yesterdays be damned!" was the hot reply. "Do you think I do not know that Griscom trollop and her red cloak?"

Betsy Ross

I have but just left her. I charged her with deceiving me. The kisses you had of her were mine once——”

“Oh, you lie—you lie!”

“Aye, do I so, you limp liver? I can tell you more—more!”

And here Clarence Vernon, fairly beside himself, drew toward Ashburn and whispered in his ear a vile insinuation; then he leaped back into the posture of a swordsman as he exclaimed:

“Come on, if you dare let out that grain of courage in your cowardly carcass?”

There was now but slight difference in the depths of the passion of the two men. The blood that had mounted to the cheek of Ashburn in the beginning, at the whispered words of Vernon surged back to his heart, a hot enough flood, leaving his face as pale as ashes. The landscape seemed to swim around him, and so engrossed in their quarrel of misunderstanding were both the young men that neither saw the door of the meetinghouse open, or marked the sexton, who, hearing the last exclamation of Vernon as he cut the air with his sword, and uttered his denunciation aloud, hurried from the building to get at the cause and quell whatever quarrel might be forward; for in those days of bickering with England, fights, fatal and otherwise, were fierce and frequent.

The old man was unnoticed, yet well within ear-shot when he saw Ashburn throw off both upper and under coat and stand in the moonlight in shirt

The Curse of the Red Cloak

sleeves and waistcoat. He saw the flash of steel as the young man drew his rapier, and heard his return to Vernon :

“Infamous, you cur! This is beyond endurance. I will kill you! On guard, you hound!”

And without heeding the sexton’s low cry of “Gentlemen! Gentlemen!” the two madmen began their fight.

CHAPTER X

THE FIGHT

By this they had both moved to the slippery path, while Ketch was floundering through the deep snow. The Quaker's detestation of warfare did not prevent his seeing each phase of the contest, for had the sun been shining the details could hardly have been plainer.

There was little inequality between the men in size, reach, and skill, but the violence of their passions prevented either from giving great attention to the finer laws of fence. The fury of the onset bespoke the short life of the conflict, and ere the hurrying sexton could interfere, save by voice, there was a tangle of flashes, and the old man saw Ashburn lose his footing just as Vernon thrust; and he thought he saw the thrust go home, for the supercargo fell to his knees, his sword still in position.

The fact was, however, that Ashburn's slip had saved him, the rapier of his *vis-à-vis* passing over his shoulder instead of through him. Vernon was not so fortunate. The state of the path that had caused Ashburn's fall rendered his own footing uncertain, and in the viciousness of his thrust he too slipped and lost control of his own body, which,

The Fight.

meeting no resistance, fell fairly on the still extended point of his kneeling rival, and the steel entered his chest. With a quick recover, which drew the sword from the wound, he started up, but the shock of cold steel so near his vitals was too much for him, and with a deep groan he fell on his back in the snow, unconscious, his sword still in his clinched hand.

At that moment the sexton arrived, and with a suppressed exclamation of horror ran to the prostrate body of Vernon and bent over it as Ashburn struggled to his feet. This young man's passion, somewhat cooled by his victory, was still intense, nor did he pay much attention to his fallen foe at first, for, seeing the sexton apparently giving him assistance, he slipped his sword into its sheath and donned his coat and greatcoat ere he approached the two. As he did so, Ketch looked up and recognized the supercargo.

"Master Ashburn," he cried, getting up from his knees, "is it indeed thee? What was the reason for this? No political broil, surely, for both are of one mind."

"He insulted me; he insulted—well, he drove me mad! The man is a villain, and he will remember me!"

"Nay, he will not remember thee!" was the response. "Whatever he did he has paid dearly for it. It is more than serious business. He is dead!"

"Dead—dead!" gasped the young man. "Are you sure?"

Betsy Ross

"I have seen too many such in my time not to be sure. I would to God I had not seen this!"

The realization that he had taken human life caused Ashburn to reel as though struck, and brought his passion under control. He soon recovered from the shock of this information, however. His conscience did not accuse him, nevertheless to his mind the punishment he had intended to inflict would have fallen short of death. He fully realized, also, that had he not drawn his sword, the passion of Vernon would not have respected the position he had taken, and he, in all probability, would have now been lying low in place of his opponent.

"He deserved to die, though I did not mean to kill him," said the young man.

"Doubtless his deserts were great," returned the Quaker, "but its effects on thee are more to be considered. Dost thee know the law? Dost thee not know that this is murder in its meaning; that thee are certain to be hanged or imprisoned for life? And thee the same as son of my best friend! What will thy aunt say at thee being a murderer, and taken red-handed?"

"Murder!" exclaimed Ashburn, aghast at the picture the Quaker had drawn. "Why, it was he who challenged me."

"Nay, my son, my son! But it was not he that challenged thee. Think not that Thomas Ketch will protect thee with a lie! Nay, I heard thee declare openly that thee would kill him, and then bid him take his guard. So must I testify when thee

The Fight

are taken. If thee knows this youth thee knows what thee must suffer."

"I know his name is Vernon, and I know——"

"Then thee knows that his father is the great Justice Vernon of Virginia. And he is rich and powerful; his influence is great. I know the young man to be an ungodly youth—who does not? A drunkard, a scoffer, and lost in profanity. Yet he is the son of his father! What chance have thee? Thee must escape! What is upon me this night that twice I have shielded a crime which by God's law and man's I should condemn? Thee has but little time. See, I have my back toward thee. Fly—flee for thy aunt's sake. Thee would not kill her too?"

The old man dropped again upon his knees beside Vernon, turning his back to Ashburn, who, now beset with a fear born of the words of the sexton, stood like a stone as he tried to drive from himself the fact that he was an outlaw in the eyes of men if not in the sight of the Almighty. The full realization of the injustice from which he had suffered and would yet suffer came upon him. He knew too well the rawness of the times in which he lived, and knew, too, that his politics, which he had never made an effort to conceal, in the high court that would try him would count as much against him as the sword thrust. He saw his present career, and probably his whole future, blasted in an instant, and his soul revolted against the conditions. Could he give himself up and tamely submit to be the victim of prejudice and passion?

Betsy Ross

Could he bear to see his aunt sink under this blow? Could he live and know of the suffering and shame of the gentle girl who even now, he was aware, sat at her window with eyes alert for the spark of a lantern on the distant deck? No, never—never. His brain began to whirl with a multitude of conflicting emotions, and he made no movement beyond raising his eyes and fixing them upon the light that shone clear from an upper window in the Griscom house.

“Art thee still there?” said the sexton, turning his head. “Will thee use no speed and escape while yet thee may?”

“You are a good man, Friend Ketch,” returned the youth, without animation, “but I am helpless—and innocent. I will stay, for I know not where to go.”

“Thy innocence may as well have been guilt, I tell thee,” said the old man, rising and speaking with more force and hurry than he had yet done. “My gratitude to thy aunt makes me wish to aid thee and her—it is small return enough. Thee *must* go. My log canoe—thee knows I can not row a boat—is tied at the little landing above the great one. Go to it, paddle to the Liverpool packet—not to thy own ship—and take passage, giving a false name. She sails within the hour. Thee knows her. Overturn the canoe as thee clammers aboard, letting her go adrift with thy hat and coat, or something to identify thee. They will think thee drowned. Seest the way now?”

The Fight

"My God! My God!" exclaimed the young man. "My poor darling—my poor aunt!"

"Thy aunt shall be told——"

"No, no; say nothing," said Ashburn abruptly. "I will go—but tell no one. It is better so. Let them think me dead, since I can never return openly. There are other reasons that I may not tell you. Will you promise?"

"I promise. Has thee money?" said the sexton, taking the hand held out to him. "Get thee gone, and quickly. Here comes a light."

"Yes, yes," said the young man hurriedly; then turning, he extended his disengaged hand toward the window in the distance and, with his heart in his voice, sobbed out:

"Oh, my lost darling! I must be dead—I am dead to you!" And with a "God bless thee, Friend!" he hurried away.

CHAPTER XI

THE MARTYR

"AH! is it so, is it so?" said Ketch as he again sank down by Vernon. "I faintly guess who thee means, young man, but thy aunt's heart shall not break, for all my promise—and 'tis like she knows thy love. Thee are a brave youth. May thy—*What!*"

Bending low, he placed his hand upon the heart of the prostrate man. There was a strong beat, and the wounded youth at that instant took a long breath, opened his eyes, and promptly fainted. Instead of at once hurrying after Ashburn, the sexton delayed a moment. Raising his pale face and single hand to heaven, he prayed as he had once before prayed that evening, and it was a prayer of thankfulness.

The moment's delay was fatal; the tragedy of the night was about reaching its climax. But little it troubled the sexton, who with the utmost fervency closed his supplication.

His first thought was aid for the wounded man; his next, and the one which most appealed to him, was to recall the youth that had fled, that he might both lighten his heart and obtain his assistance.

The Martyr

The latter he would undoubtedly have acted upon had he not at that moment spied the black figure of a man bearing the lantern he had marked but a few moments before. The man approached. Thinking it was the watchman, Bass, the sexton awaited his coming, determined to expedite matters by sending him for help while he himself followed Ashburn.

But it was not the watchman, for as the newcomer arrived upon the scene, by the light of the lantern and the full moon Thomas Ketch found himself confronted by a seaman whose rich dress and black beard bespoke the captain of the slaver Fair Virginia.

In a fraction of a second the sexton recognized the personality of the ex-pirate, and with wonderful liteness for one so aged, was down beside the body of Vernon, crouching in the snow, to all appearances tending the fallen man.

With a gruff "Wot's this?" the seaman brought the light to bear full on the face of Vernon, who, though breathing, looked like a corpse in the cold gleam. For a moment the sexton appeared at a loss for an answer, as indeed he was, but neither from a lack of wit nor access of fear. He had known many an inward contest in his day (who has not?), yet nothing that equaled the mighty conflict that raged within him then—a contest between soul and body, between courage and cowardice. He came to himself—a martyr.

"A young man killed in a brawl, I think. I found him lying here," he finally answered in a

Betsy Ross

low voice—a voice changed from his usual quaver inasmuch as it had lost its tremulousness.

“Be ye tongue-tied, or has yer head missed stays that ye hang fire in yer mouth?” said Radley, sinking on one knee opposite the Quaker. “Ho, ho! I fairly think I met this young man but yesterday! He had spliced the main brace so thick ’twould not run through the block. He could scarce navigate, an’ had a pilot lashed alongside as he warped out o’ the Bag o’ Nails! Do ye know him?”

“Yea.”

“Yea—to me? Ye be one o’ those mealy-mouthed Quakers, I take it! Who is he, then?”

“An ungodly man like thyself, Joseph Bradley! I will no longer be a partner with Belial by concealment! Dost thee not know *me*?”

The Quaker had risen to his feet and confronted the man before him. His erstwhile bent figure was erect, and the deep fire in his eye seemed to play on the surface. The slaver slowly straightened himself. Like a sleepwalker’s, his eyes were fixed on the lean figure of the old man, spellbound. As though in a trance he lifted the lantern high, for the moon was at the sexton’s back, peering into the face of the Quaker, who met his gaze steadfastly. Slowly the pirate raised a finger, coarse and crooked as a misshapen carrot, and pointing at the long red scar on the sexton’s face, he dropped the light in the snow, and clapping his hands together, cried:

“By the brand o’ the devil in hell! The hunt is up! I have found ye at last, Captain Kettle!”

The Martyr

"Yea," was the deep response.

"Aye, an' in the garb o' a saint—a saint like Griscom! What luck led me hither? An' had ye not told me I never would ha' known ye. Griscom hid ye well!"

"Friend Griscom hid me not, and God forbid that I should hide myself from thee. 'Tis a thing I never yet did, Joseph Bradley! I thought thee was dead long since."

"Ho, ho! Well, I ain't! And I know my dear ole skipper is glad to see his ole shipmate arter all these seventeen years!"

And the slaver showed his fangs in a laugh as far from mirth as was the set face of the sexton.

"God knows that I am happy thee lives, Joseph Bradley," was the calm reply, though in the parted lips of the pirate the old man could read all horrors.

"Seventeen years!" continued the slaver, rubbing his great hands together, but not removing his eyes from the face of the other. "Seventeen years it took to make ye glad; seventeen long years since ye sent me an' twenty-one o' my mates ashore on a damned West Injy key to bury two chests o' treasure, *you* said *then*; two chests o' scrap iron *I* say *now*. An' ye sailed away with the tother five o' the crew *and* the treasure. Ye uster be a master hand at a joke, Captain Kettle, an' I hain't seed ye from that day to this, an' now I'm laughin' at it. Oh, an' I've been a-yeearnin' for ye like a lost sweetheart!"

Still rubbing his hands, the man paused both for breath and for control of the energy which like

Betsy Ross

a storm was rising within him, while his aged victim simply uttered a deep-toned "Well?"

"Well!" continued Bradley, half-choked by the rage he was trying to hide under a cloak of facetiousness. "Well, an' ain't the dear ole skipper anxious to hear how his marooned crew spent their summer vacation on the hot sand? Ain't he a-dyin' fer the sekle?"

There was no answer.

"Speak! damn ye!" broke out the slaver, changing his manner to one of unalloyed ferociousness.

"I would know what became of them; and, Joseph Bradley, think not that thee can accuse me with half the force I have accused myself," answered the sexton quietly.

"I can't, hay, ye doubly cursed hypocrite! I can't, can't I? I can tell ye how every man save six died o' hunger an' thirst an' fever—died cursin' the God that made you an' them; died mad, some on 'em; an' by the mark! ye may guess how the six prayed fer their dear, good, kind-hearted ole captain!"

As the sexton listened to this, for the first time he appeared moved. His white head (there was no powder on his hair) bent low as though the weight of the man's words were too much for him, as indeed they were. His clasped hands twisted and untwisted, but as the speaker paused he raised his head and spoke.

"Joseph Bradley, I am an honest and god-fearing man now, and have been for years. My crimes

The Martyr

have been many and great. I have suffered and yet will suffer for them, but in the brief time yet allowed me I am striving in all ways in my power to atone for them. If ever man honestly regretted the past and hoped for forgiveness in the great hereafter, I am that man. As for the treasure——”

“Damn the ship, an’ treasure, an’ your twaddle!” blurted out the slaver, cutting him short. “An I cared fer gold I could have it by denouncin’ ye—by denouncin’ Griscom. I could skin ye both! Wot’s gold to a man who has spent months o’ his life in wuss than hell?”

“But two of the crew and myself lived to reach shore,” continued the sexton, without a sign of either fear or anger.

“I knows it—Bill Stafford an’ Tom Barry. I’ve seed ’em, but you’ll never see ’em—leastwise not on this ’arth. We made it up all peaceable, an’ they both told me everything an’ shipped along o’ me on that slaver out there. They knowed how easy an’ good-natured I was. Poor Stafford slipped overboard one dark night, an’ not much of a sea a-runnin’ either. I could ha’ cried—honest, I could. We had a cargo o’ three hundred Congo niggers under battened hatches, an’ I sent Barry down the hold to locate a leak, but I reckon he never found it—leastwise he ain’t reported it yet.”

“God forgive thee, Joseph Bradley! A man must needs have been hard to deal with such as thee. I do not think to justify myself, but what I did to thee and thy mates was not done in cold blood. I

Betsy Ross

knew thee was about to mutiny and seize the ship. It was myself and the faithful five of the crew against thee, and I outwitted thee."

"There was little wit in it. 'Twas Stafford that split. I was never fer trustin' him."

"So between thee and me the account is even," returned the sexton with a flash in his eye that the expirate might have marked. But if he did, it only made his passion seethe to the point at which it boiled over.

"No!" he thundered with an oath, uttered so violently that it was heard in the meetinghouse, though such was the discipline, the repression of feeling, among the congregation of Quakers, that it passed without comment or protest, if not without notice. It was supposed that the sexton would quiet disturbers of the peace. But the sexton was thoroughly employed.

"No?" he returned softly. "What does thee wish?"

"The 'arth is too little for both on us," returned Bradley in a somewhat lower tone; "and I have sworn but now, to my old employer and yours, that I will get even with ye an' damn the consekences. The ole fox tried to buy me off, an' I have the fool's guineas in my pocket. Ho! but drab is a color that goes well with weak wits. Nay, ye smooth-tongued hypocrite, I will not be cheated o' ye"—and here the slaver's face became like that of a demon—"I tell ye I will kill ye!"

The sexton barely moved.

"Then I am here and as ready as I ever will

The Martyr

be," was the calm answer. "My time can not be long at best. Poverty is my lot; my pay of Friends is trifling, and were it not for the help of a good woman I would starve. I will not cry for aid. I might have done that long since, for I guessed thy purpose—it has been upon me all day. There is no witness! Strike!"

"Curse ye, I will!" returned the other, opening his coat and drawing out the dagger he had once laid upon the table at the Bag o' Nails. His purpose was plain, and his rage high enough to bring him to any deed of violence. It is probable that Ketch, or Kettle, would have been stabbed on the instant had it not been for Vernon, who at that moment gave a deep groan.

The pirate paused, looked toward the prostrate youth, and returned his knife to his bosom. A new idea had struck him.

"Who is he?" he asked abruptly, altering his manner and the subject.

The Quaker opened his eyes in genuine surprise, but otherwise expressed no emotion at the apparent change in the purpose of his violent and desperate enemy.

"I am rejoiced to see thee hast at least one drop of the milk of human kindness left within thee, Joseph," he said. "The youth is one Clarence Vernon, son of the judge. His father is rich, and the boy should have attention at once."

"An' he'll get it," replied Bradley, stooping over the young man and taking a flask of brandy from his

Betsy Ross

pocket. "Rich, hay!" he said, half aloud. "Why, here's the matter as plain as day, an' me on the windy side o' the law. I'll be yer friend," he added soothingly as he applied the flask to the blue lips.

"God be thanked!" said the sexton with fervor. "Joseph Bradley, there is hope even for thee. Bide a moment and I will have further talk with thee; now I must hasten and call."

Without doubt the sexton's intended call was to be to Ashburn, who by this was well on his way toward the foot of the hill, and it is equally without doubt that the slaver mistook his purpose. Whether or no he had been too cowardly to strike while the sexton's eye was upon him, and was awaiting an opportunity to work behind the old man's back, or whether he feared his victim would escape him, can not be known. It might have been that he looked upon the intention to call as a threat. At all events, as the sexton turned toward the meeting-house, presumably to get his hat, for he was bare-headed, the pirate looked up with all the malignancy of his nature in his eyes. His mouth parted again in a diabolical smile, and, picking the rapier from the limp fingers of the still unconscious Vernon, he leaped after the departing Quaker and buried the sword in his back. The old man fell forward upon his face, while the pirate exclaimed savagely: "Call, would ye? Call now." And delivering a violent kick upon the body, he returned to Vernon, and replacing the rapier in its owner's hand, closed the cold fingers about its hilt.

CHAPTER XII

THEE MUST ATONE!

THE time between the seizure of the sword, the murder, and the return of the weapon had been scarcely half a minute, but even in that short space there had been great improvement in the condition of the wounded man. Great is the pity he had not recovered sooner. Bradley had barely time to settle himself beside the youth and reproduce the flask of brandy before Vernon regained his faculties and opened his eyes. He struggled to a sitting posture and, instinctively placing his hand over the wound in his chest, groaned again.

"Be o' good cheer, lad! Ye be comin' into the wind in fine shape. I saw it all, an' I will stand by ye."

Vernon looked about him in the dazed manner of one regaining his wits after too sound a sleep. He was so placed, however, as not to see the body of the sexton, which was directly behind him.

"Where—where is the other man—my opponent? I saw him fall as I thrust," he said, letting his eyes rove over the snow.

For an instant the slaver was nonplussed, but

Betsy Ross

his ready wit was not long at fault, for, as he got the youth to his feet, he answered :

“ Fell—aye, he fell, poor lad ! ”

“ Was he badly hurt? Did—did I kill him? ”
faltered the youth as he leaned against the stocky figure of the slaver ; then, noticing the peculiar makeup of his supposed rescuer, he concluded :
“ Who are you? ”

“ I be the captain o’ the Fair Virginia, that brig yonder. I was about jinin’ ship after visitin’ a pore sick man, when I saw the muss. Be ye sorely hurt? ”

“ No—yes—I fancy not, but the shock was awful. He did it by an accident. Did I kill him, or what? Where is he? ”

The slaver’s brain had not been idle, and his ready invention (the trump card of a villain) had almost instantly opened the way for him to not only escape the consequences of his own act, but to reap a decided advantage from the existing conditions. The stabbing of Kettle was no blot upon his withered conscience ; instead, there was a degree of exultation about him as he saw the point to be made. It mattered little to him who suffered for his crime if he obtained his object. With an incidental but internal remark, “ An easy helm, I’ll warrant! ” he answered promptly enough :

“ Did ye kill him? Well, I fancy ye killed him dead, poor fellow! The watch kem an’ carried him away, an’ I promised to stay by ye until they kem back fer ye. Why, ye be truly a devil with the

Thee Must Atone!

sword, an' when yer blood is up it sort o' blinds ye, don't it?"

"Coming back for me!" said Vernon, his weakness yielding to his alarm. "I can walk a little. I must get home. My father will reward you for any favor shown me."

The slaver knit his brows, compressed his lips, and shook his head as he looked about him. All was quiet. Front Street had never seemed so deserted at that hour. The way Fortune was favoring him made him bold to play his game.

"Nay, nay, young sir," he returned, with an attempt at being impressive, "I am an honest man, though very pore, bein' far too good fer the horrible bizness I ha' been forced into, an' too tender o' heart to make it pay as it should. Would it be right, now—I ask ye—would it be right fer me to let ye go, an' ye with the blood of two men on yer soft white han's?"

Vernon gazed into the face of Bradley, who with downcast eyes and shaking head was making an attempt at meekness of mien.

"*Two* men!" he exclaimed with increasing vigor as in his alarm he forgot his own wound. "What do you mean, sir?"

"That is just wot I says. The blood in ye made ye blind. I can see why ye might ha' wanted to lay out the young feller; but what had ye agin that pore, defenseless, one-armed ole man, who only ran out o' the meetin' to make peace?" The slaver indicated the fallen sexton by a movement of his head.

Betsy Ross

In two strides Vernon was by the side of the murdered man and turned his pale face to the moon. He started back aghast.

"*I kill him!—I kill him!* Impossible, man! I did *not* kill him! It is old Ketch, the sexton. I—I remember marking his coming—but—my *God*, man, I did not do this!"

"Aye, but ye *did* do this!" answered Bradley as he gazed upon the agonized youth with an eye in which those who knew him might have read amusement. "Oh, but I saw ye, lad; I *saw* ye!" he continued with forcible emphasis. "I only wish I hadn't a-seen ye, cos now they'll keep me here as a witness, an' I wos to sail right off. Why, ye look to be but a younker, but ye laid about ye wi' yer sword like a wild man. See—ye have it in yer hand even now. Better give it to me; I'm afeard o' ye."

"My God! my God! it's murder!" cried the young man as he staggered in the snow bewildered, casting his eyes wildly about, as though looking for assistance or for some one to deny the damning fact before him.

With an easy, soothing manner the slaver stepped to his side.

"Pore lad—pore lad! Aye, murder it is, an' without just cause; an' 'tain't at all likely ye meant to do it. I feels fer ye, indeed I do, an'—an'—if ye wants—I know how I kin save ye."

"You can! How?" exclaimed the young man, his thoughts driven into the channel of self-preser-

Thee Must Atone !

vation. He had no knowledge of the depths of perfidy to which his fellow-man could descend. Nor was this strange in one reared as he had been, nor in one of his nature, for by instinct Clarence Vernon was just, and when out of his cups, none had a better right to the title of "gentleman." Though his father was a prominent jurist, he himself had not the least taste for law and knew nothing of its processes, but he had a horror of being under the law as a criminal (probably as does the majority of the world) on account of its association with all that is vile. He did know the value of appearances, and in the case before him it was the word of a man whose sword was wet with blood against the word of an uninterested and peaceable trader, for at that period slavery had the sanction of every nation under the sun. To Clarence Vernon the situation was desperate ; to him the man by his side was a diamond in the rough, an angel raised to help him in his great necessity, the greatest, so far, of his life. He no more suspected his would-be savior than he would have suspected his own motives under reversed conditions, and his heart went out in thanks to the burly sailor. In mind he saw himself a criminal before society ; he saw himself before his just though stern father, and heard the wild outcries of his sterner and far more demonstrative mother, who, thrown from her social pedestal, would never forgive the cause. His home at best had been none too bright. He saw ahead of him the detestation of the powerful Society of Friends, and knew how

Betsy Ross

prone they were to flay with the tongue, although they held the arm as paralyzed.

In a rage rendered uncontrollable by jealousy and drink he had killed two men. He might justify one death, but not the other, and his stimulated brain, quickened by fear, pictured himself transported as a criminal at least, and that but as a concession from a sentence *in extremis*.

Therefore it was with an emotion akin to relief that through the whirl of his thoughts he heard Bradley's proposal to save him. He knew that he might fairly promise any reward to the one who would prevent the disgrace of his arrest as a criminal from falling on his family, and when in answer to his rather wildly put question as to how he could be saved, the slaver asserted that he would be free of both the consequences and appearance of guilt by sailing away with him to England from where he could communicate to his family any story he pleased, he closed with his supposed rescuer.

"Ah, my son!" returned Bradley, "it goes sore agin my conscience to do this. Arter all, I shall well arn wot I gets. I'm the only witness, ye know. I kin stop here or I kin go aboard. There would be but few would do it, but as ye wish it an' will pay fer it, I'll be a friend to ye, my boy, though I hang for it. Come, let's be gone, for I run a risk as well as ye. I promised to stand by ye till they kim back, an', by the dolphin strike! ain't I a-doin' it?"

Together they went slowly down the hill, the

Thee Must Atone!

slaver supporting his companion, who, by this, was genuinely faint again. Hard by the landing on which was waiting the boat's crew of the Fair Virginia, Lemuel Bass met the couple face to face. He saw the captain assisting what to him was an intoxicated young man, but the weak head, carried low, hid the countenance from the watchman, and he passed on with the mental remark, "Faith, an' the slaver's pressed some poor devil instead of being pressed himself!" and Lemuel Bass continued up the hill.

Ten minutes from the time Vernon fled the scene of the tragedy, Mr. Samuel Griscom settled his broad-brimmed hat upon his head, struggled into his heavy drab greatcoat, and started late for meeting. He was in a lighter mood than he had been all day, for upon him was the consciousness that he had done a good and generous deed, and, from his worldly standpoint, good and generous it had been. From the slaver, after much argument and rum, had been extracted a reluctantly given promise that he would not seek blood vengeance on his old captain, and in return the ex-pirate had been made the richer by two hundred shining guineas, which had but scant time to become warm in his pockets ere the oath he had passed was broken.

The Quaker walked briskly. He had not far to go. He approached the meetinghouse somewhat hurriedly, for he was anxious to place himself once more upon record as upholding the cause of the king as well as the Friends' law of nonresistance

Betsy Ross

to the royal policy of placing a tax upon the American colonies without American representation in Parliament. He, too, with strong appreciation, took in the beauty of the night, and as his eye roved over the expanse of snow glittering in the moonbeams, it caught a black object lying by the path. In a moment he saw it was a man, and with common instinct he approached the prostrate body with no more thought than that it was some fallen drunkard who was in danger of freezing. Turning the face upward, one glimpse of the calm countenance made him rigid, and he so remained until he caught a faint moan, and saw the eyes of the wounded man open with a look of recognition. Then he was horror-stricken. There was not the slightest need for an explanation. He knew the history of the crime as surely as though his own eyes had witnessed it. Raising his voice, he shouted the words "Help!" and "Murder!" until it seemed as though the horizon rang with the cry.

The alarm penetrated the meetinghouse, but the spirit had moved an elder to speech, and for a few moments no one stirred; disturbances were too common, the importance of the matter on hand too great. The genial watchman coming up the hill heard it, and he quickened his steps to a run, but his breath giving out early, he seemed to gasp himself along, his lantern bobbing like a demented will-o'-the-wisp. He arrived on the scene breathless and without the power to speak, though not without the power to hear and observe.

Thee Must Atone!

And he observed that Griscom had the sexton's head upon his knee, his ear close to the dying lips, as though receiving his last faint words. In truth, they were the last faint words the passing Quaker whispered to his friend—few, indeed, but not to be forgotten by the man who heard them.

“I have atoned in blood, Samuel; *thee—must—atone—also.*”

“Was it Joe Bradley?” asked Griscom in a fierce hurry as he noticed the rapid ebbing of the sexton's life.

“Bradley, aye, Bradley!” came in the faintest breath.

That was all, for ere the watchman could reach the two he heard the death rattle and saw the sudden fall of the head, and Captain Kettle, alias Ketch, had gone home and taken Joseph Ashburn's secret with him.

Lemuel Bass, unable to articulate, stood, his broad chest heaving, sending his gaze about him, while the stricken Quaker still held the corpse and remained motionless. The watchman was not a brilliant man, yet it needed but a glance for him to mark the torn snow and blood splashes, which lost nothing of their significance in the broad moonlight. Signs of a fray were about, and the body of the old sexton, whom he at once recognized, spoke loudly of murder. Without the ability to more than gasp, he stood there, distress and hurry both written on his broad features, and while yet in that state he became dimly conscious that he was standing upon something

Betsy Ross

hard in the snow. With a mind alert for clues, he stooped and picked up the object. It was a jeweled dagger, and the moonlight brought out the fire of the gems with which the hilt was studded. The Quaker saw it as well, and recognized it instantly. The day before, at the Bag o' Nails, he had seen it on the table, and it had been exhibited before his eyes even in his own house within the hour, thrown down carelessly, as though the owner wished to be rid of the encumbrance, but always a menace, a badge of the desperate character of its owner—a silent threat. Griscom was about to exclaim at the recognition, but the devil of policy held his tongue. He laid down the body of the dead sexton, and got to his feet as he saw the watchman put the rich weapon in his own pocket.

"The man is dead!" said the Quaker, in a dazed manner. "It is Ketch, the sexton! Who did this? Where has thee been?"

There was something in the Quaker's tone that grated on the ears of Lemuel Bass, a delicate reflection on his function as a guardian of the peace, as though, not having prevented the tragedy, he should explain it.

"Aye," he returned, at last getting a deep breath, "the man is dead! See the blood about! He has been murdered, nothing less, an' jeweled knives go well with gold-laced hats, velvet breeches, an' broadswords! However, would ye expect me to place the ban o' murder on a man offhand, Samuel Griscom?"

Thee Must Atone!

“Nay, by no means, Friend,” returned the Quaker promptly. “I meant not to cast reflections on thee or thy office. The Lord has struck with a heavy hand this night, and I was bewildered. Go thou to the meeting and beg for help.”

CHAPTER XIII

“NO LIGHT! NO LIGHT!”

AT her chamber window Betsy Griscom sat with one hand on her rapidly beating heart (depressed for all its hurry), the other shading her eyes from the glare of the three candles she had placed in the casement. She looked out over the broad expanse of the Delaware, but the beauty of the night was now lost on her; its quiet brought no peace. She had sat there a long time. She had seen the brig Fair Virginia slip away, the first of the three ships to get off. Her eyes, sharp at all times, and doubly so now, saw no light on the Salvator, though plainly she marked the fore-topsail and the main course drop from their yards as softly as silken curtains, ready for the first breath of wind that should blow. The ship still lingered, perhaps, thought the girl, to let the Liverpool packet clear her, for she saw that great vessel follow the slaver slowly and majestically. It passed, but still the Salvator seemed to hang as if waiting, though, finally, as slowly as the others it moved to the force of the ebb.

Still no light. She scarce believed her eyes, until she saw the Salvator's masts pass behind the meetinghouse and emerge again. And now the ship

“No Light! No Light!”

had gathered way and yet no spark shone from her black deck.

“No light! No light!” She hurried into her cloak and hood—her blood-red garments—and flew from the house. Hastening along the path, she marked a dark body of men coming toward her and moving slowly. Among them, and heading the procession, came her father. She crossed the street knee deep in snow to avoid a meeting with her parent, and flanking the approaching company, came out near the great oak. From there the Salvator was in plain sight, but growing fainter, her masts, spars, and ropes mingling mistily, her limp sails ghostly in the moonlight. The girl turned her eyes landward and said aloud:

“My light is there; it burns clearly. The ship has weighed her anchor and gone. He is surely aboard long since—and—and—no signal to me! O Joseph! how could thee?”

She sank down on the bench and buried her face in her hands, but for an instant only, for she was soon beset by a horrid thought. She remembered that her father had gone out to attend meeting but shortly before she had left the house. From her window she had marked him go down the path and already he was returning. The men she had met were walking slowly, as though carrying a burden. An awful fear possessed and almost paralyzed her, then she fairly flew toward the path. She came to where the snow had been trampled by many feet, but there was one spot that seemed to have been

Betsy Ross

avoided. It was dark, then it gleamed the color of her own cloak. The poor girl turned dizzy. To her it was all plain. Her fearful heart drew fearful pictures. To her the blood was that of her lover. To her, the men were burdened with his body; they were taking it to her father's house. She dropped on her knees in the snow and clasped her hands.

"No light!—no light! Nay, no more light for me! O Joseph—Joseph! Thee felt the doubt! 'Twas I who boasted! My God! why will true love run ever a rough course?"

Somewhat later Mr. John Ross wended his way toward the Griscom house, irresistibly drawn by what he had been told the night before was a hopeless passion. In the snow, and unconscious, he found the girl he loved, and with great wondering and a dumb worship he lifted her in his arms and bore her home to her father.

Even in the early days of his reform Samuel Griscom had not been torn by the world and the devil as he was being torn at this time. The battle between the flesh and the spirit was strong, and made more fierce by the very strength of the man. His sense of right was in nowise blunted, and it called on him to denounce the murderer of the sexton, though with equal insistence the imp of selfishness shouted the consequent loss of respectability, for as surely as the ex-pirate was brought to justice through the hands of Samuel Griscom, just so surely would the Quaker's history be laid bare and occasion his social fall.

“No Light! No Light!”

When the conscience of a man possessing the temperament of the Quaker was disturbed, somebody was bound to suffer. For years he had considered his wild youth and the gains he had gathered from the crime of others as balanced in full by his reform and his affiliation with the Society of Friends. Nothing had marred the smoothness of his self-satisfaction; but as the years had gone, so had grown his strictness of life, and probably, also, a slow but unnoticed increase of the Spirit, which, though not yet fully fledged, was strong enough to battle with the devil yet in the man, and cause a mighty unrest in his breast—an unrest in no way tending to soften his manner or improve his temper. There are some dispositions unequal to adversity or even disturbance of mind.

Therefore the red cloak enveloping the inanimate form of his daughter Betsy was a veritable red rag to the man whose brain was in the condition of that of a badgered bull. Here was something over which to fume and give vent to the pent-up feelings within him, and the foolish Quaker acted as though the scourge of his tongue applied to another would in some way redeem his own fault.

The relief of the girl on finding that the dead man was not her lover made her willing to endure the weight of her father's terribly worded denunciation. Her worldliness and vanity were dwelt upon as though she had committed a mortal sin; nor was there a sign of self-condemnation, meekness, or repression in the flashing eyes, ponderous voice, and

Betsy Ross

unbending sternness of her father. It was not a volcanic upheaval of spirit that wore itself out by its own violence. Instead of either softening in character or lessening in number, the lectures became more frequent and more violent. The girl returned not a word, but sat with bent head under the daily tirade, which became fiercer and fiercer as the Quaker attempted to condone for his own shortcomings by visiting upon his children, and especially his daughter Betsy, not only a stricter adherence to the letter of the law, but exercising such a surliness of demeanor and such a close scrutiny of manners and morals that at length it became unbearable to the heartstricken and apparently deserted girl, and she ended it by leaving her home and taking shelter under the roof of Mistress Nellie Ashburn at that lady's earnest solicitation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FLIGHT OF TIME

THE town of Philadelphia had been stirred to its quiet center by the events of that evening in December, 1773. A murder, a death by drowning, and a mysterious disappearance had been recorded for that one day, and even for those times, which were growing to be more and more troublous, it was an awful array of events.

Perhaps the uncertainty of the fate of Clarence Vernon made the fact of his complete obliteration from his home and the ken of all who knew him more an incident than his death would have done. Popular opinion had never connected him with the murder of Thomas Ketch, who, lying in his tomb, was, save by two men, quickly forgotten. There was nothing to connect him with it—no motive on which to base the wildest theories. The criminal detective service was in embryo in those days, and even though the staid citizens were shocked that an unprovoked murder could have taken place among them, the political events of the times were too stirring to allow of much thought anent the killing of a destitute old man about whom no one knew anything definite. The case was not of sufficient impor-

Betsy Ross

tance to arouse the sleepy and self-contented constabulary to more than routine form, though one of their number, Lemuel Bass, had an idea on the subject, and had gathered together a few of his wished-for "fax," which later he hoped might fit a "theery." He had been the only one interested enough to attempt looking carefully for what marks the old man carried, and it was his eye and his alone that discovered, beautifully tattooed upon the sexton's remaining arm, a skull and crossbones done in blue and very small, with the letter "K" beneath it. With the habit of putting two and two together, though not invariably making the sum four, Mr. Lemuel Bass wondered what motive Friend Griscom could have for objecting to further search of the body, and why he should state so positively that the "K" stood for Ketch, and that the tattooing was the result of boyish folly, although in the same breath he disclaimed knowing aught of the sexton's past history.

Did he think the dead man had once been a sailor? he had been asked by Bass, but his answer had been vague though wordy, and closed with: "What care thee what he was? The Lord knew him and the Lord has him. Thee had best let the dead rest."

If there had been little doubt as to the manner of the sexton's taking off (it was finally unofficially settled that he had met his death in quelling a brawl near the meetinghouse), there was less in the case of young Ashburn. Here was plain circumstantial

The Flight of Time

evidence—an upturned canoe, and hard by a partly submerged greatcoat containing letters to Miss Ashburn's agents in Porto Rico and St. Kitts. Beyond a doubt the young man had been drowned while attempting to board his own ship. This theory had been corroborated by the word of Miss Betsy Griscom, who had chanced to meet him near the Bank Hill Meetinghouse, and who had bade him godspeed on his journey as he started for the landing. He had told her he would hire a boat, as he knew he was too late for his own dingy. He had undoubtedly attempted to board the moving vessel (no easy matter from a canoe) and had perished, for the captain of the *Salvator*, on that vessel's return, swore to having sailed without his supercargo.

As for Vernon, rumor was long in quieting. His father was too well known and the family too substantial for his loss to be passed over lightly. With a guess not far out in effect, society finally determined that the young man had gone into the world to seek his fortune and without his parents' consent, well knowing (so it was quietly said) that he never would be able to go with it. About a year after the young man's disappearance, however, the circle in which he had moved when at his best, and where he had been best known, was both surprised and shocked by the advent of a young British officer, a Captain Roger Bassett, attached to the —th Grenadiers, who in age, form, and feature bore such a striking resemblance to

Betsy Ross

the lost Clarence Vernon that it threw Mrs. Vernon into spasms when he was first introduced into her house, upset the judge, and so astounded those interested that the stranger was obliged to show his commission, which he did good-naturedly enough, and as though humoring a whim, and the document was found to be dated three years before the disappearance of the scion of the house of Vernon. That which was at first considered a romantic episode was finally looked upon as only a wonderful coincidence, and not a few soon marveled that they had failed to see the many characteristics in Captain Bassett unlike those of his counterpart. The captain was stouter and far more polished in manner and speech; moreover, he neither swore, drank, nor touched cards or dice, the latter follies common to both sexes, the former universal marks of blood and breeding among the younger set of males. On the breaking out of hostilities Captain Bassett went East with his regiment, and Clarence Vernon did not appear to take his place. At last there remained but little doubt of his death. The old oak had renewed its leaves and shed them again and again, and men had almost forgotten that tragic day in December, for nearly four years had passed, and society had heard no more of the missing young man.

For six months his mother had mourned for him, her grief being wild and generously spread among her friends as though it was her desire to have the burden of sorrow shared by those of her circle. But at the end of that time, like a sunburst

The Flight of Time

in the midst of a storm, she laid aside her weeds, while her temper, never of the sweetest, lost something of the added acerbity it had taken on in the days of her deepest grief. Again she took her place in society, and society, marveling, forgot the incident, matters of the day being more important than those of the past.

For by the year 1777 men had long since ceased debating. There was no more talk of policy. The American Revolution was well under way. Washington had recrossed the Delaware, the British had learned the lessons of Trenton and Princeton, and now, from having held complete possession of New Jersey, they held (and none too surely) the posts of New Brunswick and Amboy. The American military headquarters was at Morristown. Philadelphia was yet to fall into the power of the British, while Germantown and Valley Forge were not dreamed of as names to go down in history. In fact, early in the year 1777 rebeldom was flushed with hope, and gloried in the heroism of the past.

Everything flavored of war. Faction was not dead, but the Tory element in the town of Philadelphia held both head and voice very low in the spring of that year. American commerce on the high seas was at a standstill, and the Salvator, no longer a trader, had been sold, and was doing duty as a privateer under another name. Mistress Ashburn's office was closed and awaiting the better days no eye could yet discern, and that lady was living quietly on her accumulated wealth, or that portion of it she had re-

Betsy Ross

served for herself, for her donations to the American cause had gone far toward reducing her income.

Her grief at the death of her nephew had been as deep as that of Mrs. Vernon's at the loss of her son, but there had been no demonstration. These two ladies, having once been schoolmates, met on the common ground of their sorrow and compared their stock of woe, but the visits between them had long since ceased, for the assumption of the superiority of the quality of her grief made the married lady antagonize the spinster at once, while her outspoken tirades against all things American, and her fierce denunciation of the position taken by the colonies, strained the self-control of Mistress Ashburn to near the breaking point. Now, each was politely sarcastic when they chanced to meet in society, which was not infrequent.

The presence of Betsy Griscom had done much to lighten the days for the spinster, but as time smoothed the agony of the latter's loss, so did the tears she had shed seem to have watered her propensity to direct the future of others. This time it was the young Quakeress who was the mark of her intentions, and the spinster was fairly sure of her victim, for circumstances had made it necessary that the young girl should heed the advice and wishes of her elder and protector. For after having been practically disowned by her father (her mother was but a pliant tool in the hands of her husband), Miss Elizabeth Griscom was summoned to appear before

The Flight of Time

the elders of the Bank Hill Meeting, and, as she had scorned the command, she had been declared an apostate, and formally expelled from the Society of Friends. From then she was one of the little band known as "Free Quakers." On joining them she had been promptly disowned by her father, therefore she had of necessity become entirely dependent on the good will and generosity of Mistress Ashburn. And when that lady finally proposed that her *protégé* should become the wife of the upholsterer, John Ross, who, without ceasing, had continued his attentions to the Quakeress and his importunities for intercession in his behalf to the spinster, the latter was at first delighted at the chance for a contest, when Betsy burst into tears and hurried to her room, and was almost indignant when after a time the girl presented herself with a pale face and a new listlessness and consented to any arrangement that might be made for her future.

This was just after the Declaration in 1776, and almost immediately Betsy Griscom became Betsy Ross, a name honored for its honorable deserts. The wife of John Ross made no pretensions. She had no great passion for her husband, and he knew it. She had been alone, defenseless, and believed she was becoming an encumbrance. This was too much for her spirit, stricken though it had been. If John Ross wished her he might have her, and for three months she was a true wife. She made his home happier and his business to prosper, for her deft fingers brought more beauty and her pretty

Betsy Ross

head more real art into the little shop in Arch Street than had ever been seen there before.

Then, as though she was a target for adverse fate, John Ross was killed by an accident in the arsenal, and the young widow of not yet twenty-three found herself afloat on the broad ocean of circumstance, with nothing to buoy her from sinking save the stealthy help of her friend the spinster and the little shop with its stock, fixtures, and goodwill.

CHAPTER XV

A PERTURBED SPIRIT

It can not be said that Samuel Griscom viewed the disaffection of his daughter without emotion, or looked with mere indifference on her marriage and subsequent misfortune. But the iron will of the man, an attribute far from uncommon among professors of meekness, made more rigid his hard features, and his reserve became a matter of remark. No one knew of the storm that had raged under the calm exterior of the dignified old man. What betwixt his fallen fortunes (for, like the community in general, the Quaker had been hard hit by the war, and at present his party was not in the ascendant), his daughter's estrangement, and the battle between his duty and his desire which had begun hostilities on the night of the murder of Thomas Ketch, Samuel Griscom knew little of peace either of person or spirit. For the latter, he was always at war with his own conscience; for the former, always resisting the importunities of his wife to unbend his will toward his younger daughter. Like many another's, the Quaker's piety was but prejudice, and in his mind much of his trouble appeared to be due to his own laxity—a visitation of divine Providence—

Betsy Ross

and in consequence his conduct and the conduct of those whom he influenced became more strict. Paternal affection was a sentimental condition too soft to admit of great indulgence, and in the case of his daughter Betsy he attempted to strangle it by absolutely forbidding communication between her and his wife or Clarissa, and finally he forbade the mention of her name. She was an outcast from the Society of Friends, a vain, disobedient, worldly, and ungodly girl.

But these hard measures failed to bring content to the soul of the old man, albeit it brought no great amount of sorrow either, for as his daughter remained obdurate, made no appeal for his aid, nor expressed contrition for her past conduct, his feeling became one of hurt pride, which gradually hardened to a dull, sullen anger against one who, under her circumstances, would remain independent of him.

The condolence of his colleagues and the martyrlike attitude he assumed made it impossible for him to unbend in the least, so between the state of his domestic affairs and his unsettled conscience, the days of Samuel Griscom were far from crowning him with the holy calm that seemed to rest upon him. He still led, as he always had, the policy of Friends as expressed in the Bank Hill Meeting, and his wish was well-nigh the law in his community. The thought of losing this prestige was intolerable, and yet there would recur to him, making him wince, the thunder of his conscience and the last

A Perturbed Spirit

words of the murdered sexton: "I have atoned; thee must atone also."

Like a tortoise he would contract himself, and by a hardening of purpose attempt to live down his better nature. So self-centered had this man become that he failed to look beyond the strict observance of form in his own family or the narrow path of daily duties in himself. He had gotten to fear introspection, and his soul became masked in a cerement of ice; he would not think of the past lest the past arise and upbraid him. Unknown to himself, he had dammed up the sweet waters of his own soul; thus they had frozen, and frozen they might have remained had he not one day early in June, in the year 1777, picked up the Gazette and read that one John Paul Jones was outfitting a privateer at Philadelphia, and that his chief mate was to be a man who had been unusually successful in cruising under letters of marque from Congress; a man whose desperation had become a by-word along the coast; a man who, so whispered rumor, had at one time been a pirate, and who once sailed with the redoubtable Captain Kettle, long since disappeared. This man was a second Paul Jones in fury, and his name was Joel Radley.

Samuel Griscom laid down the paper with an inward groan. The burden of his long-kept secret was so great, the sore of it so thinly skinned over, that the touch of a thought made him shrink, while the name of Radley fell upon it like a heavy hand. The thing was unbearable. Without giving any

Betsy Ross

particular direction to his thoughts, but possessed by a sudden and overwhelming necessity, Samuel Griscom looked at the blank wall of his private room, rigidly upright, his hands firmly grasping the arms of the heavy chair in which he was seated. What pictures he saw none but himself could have told. It might have been the "Menè, Mene" of old, for, with an energy somewhat at variance with his late habitual slowness of movement, the Quaker set his great jaw, and planting his broad-brimmed hat firmly upon his massive head, left the house as though for a purpose.

CHAPTER XVI

JUDGE VERNON

THAT morning Mr. Justice Vernon sat in his mansion on Chestnut Street, a stone's throw from the house of Mistress Nellie Ashburn. He was in the comfortable though unenviable position of a man who has managed to obtain a seat between the horns of a dilemma without having been impaled upon either point. Mr. Judge Vernon still held the "King's Commission," locked in his strong box. He had never resigned it, but as his right to sit upon the bench had been disallowed by the rebellious colonies, he had simply stepped down with a grace and ease that had saved him from antagonizing their rising authority, and had gained for him the name of a Whig sympathizer.

Therefore, without having actually committed himself, he was in a very satisfactory position for one who lacked strong convictions, his wife supplying the rampant Tory element with a firm belief that the judge was a Royalist at heart as was she openly, while his late son's Whigism and his own mild deprecation of the state of affairs made him tolerated by the opposite faction. He was ex-

Betsy Ross

tremely satisfied with his position, as it allowed him to enjoy the income of his vast estate in Virginia, while he yet retained some degree of influence as a political martyr among the aristocrats of the colonies who, almost to a man, had espoused the cause of the king. Judge Vernon was a just man, as men go, having the prejudices of his class. To him politics was another name for policy, and one might be reasonably sure that he would be found on the winning side at the final settlement. He was aware of his past importance (it had left its mark on him in the shape of a judicial severity of countenance), and he had rising and falling hopes of what he might become in the future. His voice was well modulated and always under control (an admirable thing in one dispensing justice), but his eye belied his self-assurance, inasmuch as it possessed no particular expression. He had a trick, however, of casting his gaze around, as though seeking something, like a man forever on guard. Especially was this true of him in his own house, a manner, his detractors declared, due to the fact that the judge was married, and that, however high he stood as a jurist, his wife was head and shoulders above him in fact, and made up in force what she lacked in logic.

The judge sat in what his wife was pleased to call the breakfast room, though it was the dining room in general. He was alone and reading a letter with deep interest, his rather fine features undergoing various changes as he progressed with its

Judge Vernon

perusal. As he concluded, he folded the paper carefully and placed it in his pocket just as a rustling of silk heralded the approach of his wife, who shortly entered the room, bringing with her the effect of much motion.

Mrs. Vernon was a person whose dress, voice, and presence made it impossible for her to be ignored. Her advent was like the coming of a gale, which passing, left disorder in its track. The very expression of the peaceful room seemed to change as she entered it. The lines on the face of the lawyer lost something of their judicial hardness, as though the eminent jurist was about to plead where he preferred to prosecute.

The lady was very tall, and dressed in the excess of fashion. Her skirt was a trifle more voluminous than was common, her beaver a trifle higher and wider than actual good taste or the fashion demanded. There might have been an excuse for the immense feather fan she carried, but the embroidered face mask (for veils were not then known), the double eyeglass richly chased, and the immense silver-mounted scent bottle, were entirely unnecessary for a woman of her age, complexion, and marked keenness of sight. As was the fashion with great ladies, and those who followed the manners obtaining at court, she was closely attended by a diminutive negro, the apparent counterpart of the small darky belonging to Mistress Ashburn, and this morsel of animate ebony was turbaned and otherwise decked out with a lavish richness and display

Betsy Ross

of color which in these days would make the originator of such a mixture of cut and hue looked upon askant as being something more than merely weak-minded. Indeed, it was impossible to ignore Mrs. Vernon and her tiger.

Even her husband looked slightly astonished at the decided impression made by the combination before him, but he said nothing as his wife swept into the room, all hurry and bustle, and settled herself on a chair.

"My dear, I'm going out," said the lady, looking around the apartment as though expecting to detect something amiss, and pulling on her long mitts the while.

"It is somewhat evident," answered the judge mildly. "Is it not an unusual hour for calling?"

"Calling, indeed!" answered his wife, rustling a protest. "I should think so—and in this dress! Where are your senses or eyes? No, I am going shopping and shall stop in on my way home at Ross's, in Arch Street, to see how my new sofa is being finished. La, but I'm sorry I failed to order another wreath embroidered on the back! Mrs. Drew has just received her's from Lancaster, and it has three garlands of roses set off with flying ribbons *à la Watteau* done on satin in blue. It is too elegantly genteel. Perhaps I can get mine changed if Mrs. Ross is willing to share the cost of new stuff. I hate to think Mrs. Drew——"

"My dear!" interrupted the judge, raising his hand slowly as though asking attention, "I prefer

Judge Vernon

you would not descend to cheapening Mrs. Ross's handiwork. I think she is always reasonable, and if I might suggest——" He hesitated.

"And what would you please to suggest? And why should I not cheapen the goods of a common tradeswoman? Is it your money or mine that I spend? And what is your suggestion?"

The lady wheeled upon her husband, and held herself at rigid attention.

"My love, I have no desire for a controversy this morning. I have just received a letter—a long letter from—from——"

He looked at the darky, who stood like a decorated bronze statue, now holding the mask, fan, and dangling scent bottle, the whites of his eyes alone showing by their movements that he was animate.

"Well, well! Are you tongue-tied this morning, Judge Vernon? And you know I am in a great hurry! Roger Williams, go out and shut the door!"

The darky brought up his hand in a military salute, turned an about-face on his toes with military precision, came down upon his heels with the proper abruptness, and, halting just long enough to the fraction of a second, marched out without a word or a turn of his head, closing the door behind him. The judge hid an involuntary smile.

"Isn't he a darling?" said the lady, forgetting her impatience in her delight, as under her eye the negro showed the result of his training. "Mr. Drew bettered his price to me for him by fifty

Betsy Ross

pounds last week, but there isn't his equal in town. And you were saying——"

"I was about to say," continued the judge, in his soft, rich voice, "that the tone of your servant's dress might be lowered and still be in good form as well as taste. In fact, my dear, for shopping, your own dress is a trifle conspicuous, unless you mean to take a chair."

"Judge Vernon, do I ever interfere with your law affairs?"

The judge smiled, placed the tips of his fingers together, and shook his white wig very gently, for the powder lay thick upon it.

"Then," continued his wife, with rising asperity in voice and manner, "why do you interfere with me? Am I not the best judge of proprieties? Do they not all come to me for ideas? Nevertheless, let me say, Mr. Vernon, that I am going out shopping without a chair, but not for the purpose of shopping! Do you wish to know the reason?"

The judge gently shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," continued his wife, "perhaps you do not know that your plebeian friend, Mr. Washington, has come to town with his bodyguard—save the mark!—a bodyguard for him, and of Boston militia. They came from Middlebrook. I knew they were coming last night. Mrs. Drew told me. I waited for you to tell me, but you never pay me the least attention." The lady looked aggressively reproachful, and continued: "And do you suppose, sir, I shall let those common Whigs think they can make

Judge Vernon

me—make *me* keep within doors as though I was in distress? La—no! I wish I might be magnified that these low rebels might see how little I considered them.”

“I also knew his Excellency was to arrive, my dear,” returned her husband. “Congress had sent for him. They are considering some important question behind closed doors. You always expressed so much contempt for their proceedings that I thought you little cared. Undoubtedly your contemplated parade will crush Mr. Washington or those of his escort who see you. However, we will drop that subject for another which may exercise you more. I have just received a letter from Captain Roger Bassett. It is dated two weeks ago.”

The lady’s face took on a look of deep interest as she half arose from her seat.

“From Clarence! Oh, how——”

“Hush, madam; would you betray him? He tells me—not openly, but in a way I understand—that he is about to penetrate the American lines for the purpose——”

The judge was interrupted at that moment by a loud knock at the door, and immediately a black servant in livery announced:

“Mr. Samuel Griscom, sah, in the reception room, sah.”

The lawyer started at the name, and he withdrew his hand, still empty, from his pocket.

“But the letter, Mr. Vernon!” cried his wife as she noticed the sudden abstraction of her husband,

Betsy Ross

which under the circumstance of her presence was remarkable. "What ails the man! Let me read the letter from my son while you attend to your caller."

The judge came to himself. "Madam," he returned, "it is but seldom that I cross your desires, but this instance is to be an exception. It is as remarkable that Mr. Griscom, the Quaker—you know of him, perhaps—the father of Mrs. Ross, who disowned his own dau——"

"Yes, yes, I know the scandal. I know—but the letter!" interpolated his wife impatiently.

"It is as remarkable that he should now call upon me," continued the judge, ignoring her interruption, "as that the letter got into Philadelphia at all. Madam, your son has either gone mad or has suddenly acquired great wisdom. When you return from your errands I may tell you what I mean, but not before I have seen the gentleman in the reception room."

The judge ceased, got to his feet, bowed low, and presented his hand to his wife to lead her from the room. The lady was too dumbfounded at this sudden assumption of authority on the part of her husband to protest, and hardly recognizing her lord as her lord, placed her hand in his and was escorted to the door. There, however, she reasserted herself.

"I do think, Judge Vernon, that you can be the most exasperatingly disagreeable man a woman can imagine! How have you the heart to do this to

Judge Vernon

poor me? Do you think I will submit? Not allowed to read a letter from my own——”

“Madam!” said the judge, suddenly and harshly, “if you value his life and your own happiness you will hold your tongue! Good-morning.”

And the gentleman, bowing low, turned and trotted down the hall with the birdlike hop peculiar to small, stout men in a hurry. His wife glared after him, muttered something to herself, and seizing her diminutive negro-in-waiting, cuffed him for nothing and pushed him out of the house before her.

CHAPTER XVII

CROSS PURPOSES

THE judge's face had resumed its habitual expression of judicial severity by the time he reached the reception room. The Quaker, with a hand upon each knee and his great hat beside him on the floor, sat squarely and ponderous.

The judge bowed, merely a judicial recognition that court was now open. He tendered his gold snuffbox to his visitor with an air of concession, a pipe of peace, and seated himself, gracefully crossing his small but shapely snuff-colored legs.

"I have but a sight acquaintance with thee, Judge Vernon," began the Quaker, with but the barest inclination of his head as he waved away the proffered box. "And thee must needs know me also—but much better ere we part. I have been told that those who confide in thee do well, and, as I have also been told, thou art a good and loyal subject to the king."

The judge bowed again and took a pinch of the black powder. "I think we may understand each other at once, Mr.—or may I say, Friend Griscom? Your business, I believe, relates to a third person,"

Cross Purposes

he said, with a wave of his white hand and a pull at his lace cuffs.

"Thee are correct!" returned the Quaker, lifting his eyebrows in surprise. "I have been sorely remiss in my duty, but I shall unburden myself to thee as a man of law, and as a man of law insist upon thee carrying the matter to the end, bitter though it be to all concerned."

The judge looked puzzled. "Your words, under the circumstances, are a trifle strange, Mr. Griscom. My knowledge of the facts may be somewhat later than yours, but as a man of law I realize the impossibility of changing such facts."

"Thee can have no knowledge of the facts," returned the old man, looking straight before him, as though to hold himself from straying from his determination. "They can not be altered, I admit, but I can enter no further into bond with the devil, and I wish to speak my mind."

"You are somewhat harsh, Mr. Griscom."

"Harsh! Can thee pierce Beelzebub with a sword of down? Sir, I have had it on me to speak, but have kept silent. I have lived a tragedy! I fear nothing at last!"

The judge stiffened himself, and his ruddy cheeks lost a shade of their color. "Perhaps I misunderstand you. And you refer to——?" he said tentatively.

"Sir, I refer to the murder of Thomas Ketch, some time sexton of the Bank Hill Meetinghouse."

The judge sat back in his chair, drew a long,

Betsy Ross

deep breath, and passed his hand over his forehead as he glared at his calm but deep-toned visitor. The judicial severity of his face changed in a twinkling. He might have been a prisoner receiving sentence, and the remnant of his color fled. He nervously tapped the golden box he still held in his hand. In a voice which faltered he returned:

"Ah! yes, yes; Thomas Ketch—yes—I remember; I hardly thought—I could not guess your call would be upon this matter. I—I—you were about to remark——"

"Sir, it is upon me to tell you that I know the guilty man and desire that thee see him brought to justice."

"I!"

With a desperate effort the lawyer clutched the delicate arms of his chair, that he might steady his apparently swaying figure, for to him the words of the Quaker came like a blow. Never before in his whole judicial career had he fully realized the emotions of a prisoner standing to receive the verdict. For an instant the room whirled about him and his tongue clove to the roof of his dry mouth. Beyond the monosyllable, his first attempt to speak ended in an inarticulate sound, but he saw the necessity for answering, and was vainly trying to formulate some return when the spell under which he labored was broken by the Quaker.

"Are thee ill? Thy face looks strange and white."

"I—I—think not," said the judge, catching his

Cross Purposes

breath as though a rough hand had awakened him from a terrible nightmare. "I am subject to such—to these attacks. Your—I— Sir, can not this be postponed? Can not you wait? Have you no consideration for me, that you come to me—to me——"

The Quaker looked fairly nonplussed, but he shook his head doggedly.

"Thee speaks of suffering, Judge Vernon! What is thy physical suffering to the suffering of the mind? For selfish considerations I have held myself in open enmity with my conscience for nearly four years, and can no longer endure the torment. I know that for the first time in what seems an age the murderer of Ketch is in this town of Philadelphia. I have just learned it, and I wish him turned over to the law. I have come to thee by preference; thee should be interested, but if thee are indisposed I will take my story to the constabulary at once. I shall not endure the weight of it another day."

The Quaker spoke decidedly, with a square presentment of facts and a manner which told of the uselessness of appeal. He bent and reached for his hat, but the judge arrested his intention to depart.

"Mr. Griscom, this is naturally a most painful subject to us both. I realize the strain under which you have labored to bring you to the point of desiring this arrest. But you can hardly feel it as do I. I am now no longer a public official. I can no longer act by virtue of commanding, and—and—moreover, I thought the facts of the tragedy were

Betsy Ross

unknown to any save the—the perpetrator and the man who really, in law, might be called his ally as well as—as—his savior.”

“Thee suffer as have I?” said the Quaker, with a solemn shake of his head. “Nay, impossible. But thee be right. Only his ally has already suffered the torments of the final affliction. As for the rest, it is a secret, for, sir, it was I and I only who had the name of the murderer from the lips of Thomas Ketch ere he died. None heard it save myself, and I have carried it—aye, I have been weighted down by it—I, his ally—until the burden of divine displeasure is more than I can stand.”

The Quaker rose from the embroidered chair on which he had been sitting and strode up the room, his square heels heavily striking the polished floor. The judge looked after him with a mental protest at the supposed hard cruelty of the old man. The Quaker continued his walk to the end of the room and returned. In front of the judge he stopped.

“Sir, thee will wish me to give the name of the guilty man. I know it means disgrace—possibly a public fall for me—but I shall do my duty and take the punishment sent by the Lord. He is——”

The judge interrupted him fiercely.

“Sir, do not mention that name in this house. The crime was committed in ignorance; occasioned by madness and the heat of passion. Legally the culprit has no case, but to me——”

“Thee knows who I mean?” asked the Quaker,

Cross Purposes

with a quick knitting of his heavy brows as he turned and looked sharply at the judge.

"I do."

"And how?"

"He confessed to me immediately after his voyage. I have seen him."

"Here?"

"Here."

"And thee held thy hand!"

"I am a father, Friend Griscom, and confess I am not so hardened to my duty as to——"

"Good-day to thee, Mr. Vernon!" said the Quaker, cutting him short. "I had looked upon thee as a help; I find thee but a hindrance. I shall lay my case before others, and, sir, it may come to light that thee has abetted a murderer—a confessed murderer, a hardened villain."

"And have you not?" returned the judge. "I appeal to you, sir, as but one remove from me in this matter. Will you not keep this trouble concealed? I know you are above consideration, sir, but my whole soul—my name—the heart of my wife and our general future as well as yours, perhaps, is concerned in this. As a man—one of God's creatures; as a brother to you—my fellow; as a husband and a father—I ask you to reconsider your determination."

"How can thee be so deeply concerned? What! and has the miserable man suborned thee? Thee knows me but little, Mr. Vernon. I am as firm as the rock on Sinai. I have refused my own

Betsy Ross

appeal and shall not consider thee. I will not play the coward for thee."

The judge's terror gave way to the anger of desperation.

"Then may your hard puritanical heart laugh when you see the ruin you will have caused. Is the spirit of charity lost in the iron rule of your faith? You profess gentleness and repression, but it is only physical, for, on my soul, you would weave one tragedy into two. The man has reformed—is fighting for what he considers right; he need not be feared. I shall defend him—indeed, I must. You have cast off one daughter; why should I hope you would consider the agony of the other, or would not feel sanctified for having done your duty, even though it be the sacrifice of your own son-in-law?"

Griscom wheeled upon the little man, who, at his last vehement words, had got to his feet with such energy that his castored chair spun away from him over the smooth floor.

"*My son-in-law!* Why does thee seek to reopen an old wound? My son-in-law is dead."

"Aye, sir; John Ross is dead, but you have two daughters."

"Thee be mad, man, to appeal to such a lying inference!"

The judge began to grow more excited.

"Sir, sir, is it possible you know not of it? He was married to your daughter Clarissa within a year from the tragedy. If she could forgive——"

Cross Purposes

"Oh! my God!—my God! Either thee or I are going mad! Say that again!"

"Have I moved you at last?" continued the little judge, almost losing control of himself. "I repeat, sir, my son married your daughter on the 10th of November, 1774, nearly three years ago. There had been an attachment and a misunderstanding."

The Quaker's hat dropped from his limp grasp, and his nether lip fell—a strange exhibition of weakness in the powerful and portly man. He sank into the nearest chair.

At that moment the sun shone through a break in the clouds, and a ray, penetrating the room, struck the glass pendants of the candelabra on the mantel, and over the white wall beyond there appeared a splash of prismatic colors. The gorgeousness of the blending hues lay in the way of the Quaker's stare. He saw them, but to him they suggested the vanity of beauty, the world, the flesh, and the devil—the loss of his remaining daughter. For an instant he was thrown from his course. Gradually, however, his eye acquired a degree of fierceness, and his ponderous jaw its usual firm set.

"I heard your son was dead!" he remarked, as though clutching at a hope.

"He lives, but under an assumed name."

"An assumed name! A lost manhood! And thee acquiesced in thus making my child an apostate to the faith of her parents by such a marriage?"

"I bow to the inevitable, Mr. Griscom. I knew

Betsy Ross

nothing of it until this morning. My right to protest is as great as yours. In a measure we have been talking at cross purposes."

"Cross purposes, indeed, sir. And what has thy son's marriage to do with the question of the murder of Thomas Ketch? And why should I still seek to hide his murderer from the law? Thee may open thy mind with profit, perchance, by sticking to the subject; the rest is not for discussion here."

The little man recoiled. He thought his point had been won. He had not dreamed of such persistency of purpose under such circumstances.

"Are you Spartan instead of Quaker?" he asked. "Do you think to make a place in heaven for yourself by making hell for another? God forgive you!" And the judge wagged his head with such vehemence that the powder flew from his wig in a little cloud.

"That other has made a hell for me, though in part I have made it for myself."

"How, sir? I fail to get your meaning."

"My meaning is plain. For upward of three years I have had the knowledge on the word of a dying man that his murderer was one Joseph Bradley, partly disguised as Joel Radley—a guilty knowledge, for I had reasons for concealing the fact. This Bradley is in Philadelphia engaged in an ungodly privateering scheme against his king. I desire his arrest, though well I know I may encounter public disgrace and contumely when he shall open his mouth against me. I came to thee like a Jacob.

Cross Purposes

I have wrestled with the angel and am thrown. I sought thee that I might be rid of my sin of concealment only to find another blow, another burden ready for my shoulders. And yet, sir, I say to thee that I can bear all. If it be the will of God to strip me of my own, then I am stripped. This is all I have to say to thee. Will thee act, or must I take my tale elsewhere?"

The Quaker had bent a stern eye upon the judge as he spoke, and by the setting of his teeth it was plain his will was unchangeable. He took no apparent notice of the face of his listener, who was standing upon the rug before him, his countenance passing from one expression to another with a rapidity almost as comical as it was remarkable.

At the conclusion of the Quaker's plain statement the look on the countenance of the little judge was unlike anything he had ever worn before. If the face of a small stout man with a habitual judicial semi-frown can resemble the face of an angel, then Judge Vernon's face was angelic. The terrible burden of the belief that his son was a murderer—a mental load he had carried as long and even better than the Quaker had carried his—fell from him as the Burden had fallen from the back of Christian. His countenance fairly shone. The years dropped from him like a garment. The tears glistened in his little eyes and the depths of the man were stirred. With a shout that made the glass pendants tremble and sent the gorgeous coloring dancing over the wall, Judge Vernon seized the Quaker's hand. Lit-

Betsy Ross

tle thought he of the other's pain in his own joy. Little cared he that his son had stepped outside his circle to marry so long as the crushing weight of guilt and of guilty knowledge was lifted from them both. The little man was animated from top to toe. The powder shaken from his head filled the air about him and turned his snuff-colored shoulders white. He let his dignity fly to the winds. He forgot himself. He fairly danced as he wrung the hand which the Quaker had allowed him to take, though there was no return of the grasp, and only ever-increasing wonderment charged with a growing doubt as to the lawyer's mental condition.

"Sir! sir!" cried the judge, "I could love you! —I do love you for the words you have spoken! Lord—God be praised! My son has no cowardly murder upon his hands—nor could he have killed young Ashburn! What! How is this? Radley the murderer by the statement of the dying victim! It is the strongest point held by the law! It is the last straw lifted! I have it all! I see it all! I have letters from Clarence! Wait! I will show you! We will have that demon hanged! Wait here until I come back with the letter written from England! Why, man, I paid that devil a thousand pounds and bought my son a falsely dated commission in the English army under a false name three years ago. Good God! Wait here! Don't move!"

And in the midst of his incoherence the judge darted from the room. He tore upstairs, making the spindle balustrade shake in his effort. With a

Cross Purposes

bundle of letters in his hand he tore down again, and meeting the negro, who had come into the hall to find the cause of the unusual commotion, he commanded him almost fiercely not to allow any one—even his wife—to interrupt him under penalty of—death, he was about to say in his excitement, but ended with the equal absurdity—the law, and disappeared into the reception room, bolting the door behind him.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LITTLE SHOP

IN those olden days the number and location of the upholstery shop once owned by the late John Ross and passed to his young widow, was at 89 Arch Street. The march of improvement has been great, and the new number of the site is now 239. The building, a narrow two-and-a-half-story affair, still stands. Then it had the face of its lower floor almost entirely taken up by an immense show window (immense for those times) and an entrance door, the former made up of many small panes and extending from nearly the floor to the ceiling, the latter a door of the double type, it being divided into upper and lower halves. In the year 1777 the style of the interior was distinctively of the period, the rafters being unhidden and the wainscoting high and many paneled. A door elevated a little distance from the floor, and reached by a short flight of steps protected by a light hand rail, opened into the historic back parlor, of which more anon. The furnishing of the shop plainly showed that the finger of good taste had been laid on its arrangement, for though sufficiently commercial in flavor, there was also a sense of homelike coziness in the interior—

The Little Shop

an unconventional, unbusinesslike air not felt in the stores known to the present generation, but common enough in the days when men lived in close touch with their calling, eating, drinking, and, as it were, sleeping with it, for, as a rule, a man traded, thrived, and died under the same roof.

In the show window were displayed one or two pretty pieces of furniture of the purely colonial style, spindlelike and delicate in form and construction but with a power of resistance having little counterpart in even the more ponderous household gods of the present age. But the greater part of the display consisted of brocades, stuffs, and specimens of fine needlework in the various stitches once lauded by Betsy's one-time lover—cross-stitch, quince stitch, openwork, and the rest. There were odd pieces of furniture about the room, each in process of repair. An inlaid table with a few flakes of its mother-of-pearl to be replaced, a spinning wheel with its broken tread, a spinet showing a broad scratch across its polished face, together with two or three chairs and a small sofa upholstered in yellow satin, on the back of which a wreath was skillfully embroidered. Flags of the various styles used in the Continental army were draped with effect here and there, the center about which they were arranged being an oil portrait of an amateurish crudity of color, the subject, the leader of the colonial forces, General Washington.

It was a lovely morning in June, two days after the lifting of the burden from the life of Judge Ver-

Betsy Ross

non and the settling of another on that of Samuel Griscom. It had rained earlier, but now the clouds had rolled away and left a sky of azure bending over a fresh, green world wet with the shower that had passed. The odor of the damp earth, the glinting sunshine, and the wind, soft as silk as it brushed the cheek, made it a morning to be remembered for itself. A day that comes only in June. A day for youth, for all gentleness, for love and lovers.

Over the lower half of the shop door, with folded arms, leaned the buxom figure of Mrs. Lemuel Bass, the wife of the watchman. Save for her the shop was empty; the owner of the establishment was out. For most of those who passed along Arch Street Mrs. Bass had a nod of recognition and a smile, which showed her sound white teeth to advantage and brightened the still fair though matronly face. Indeed, she was goodly to gaze upon, from the small hand's breadth of linen on her silvering hair, caught up naturally in a comb, to the bottom of her generous stomacher, which seemed to be meant for little heads to rest and sleep upon. She was much more than a goodly sight to her husband, who, coming up from Chestnut Street at something more than his usual speed, or lack of it, saw her comely face framed in the upper half of the Dutch door. With a good-humored "Huh!" he crossed the road and appeared before her ere she was aware he was near.

"Well, my love," he began, breathing hard and wiping the perspiration from his face with an im-

The Little Shop

mense red handkerchief, "you air workin' up quite a reputation with me for mysterious disappearances. I knowed you want to home, but it's cold luck I met ye here! Wot be ye doin'?"

"Tendin' shop for Mrs. Ross while she's run out for a few things. She has no one to leave unless I drop in, poor thing! Where have you bin these two days, Lemuel? Ye do look just dead beat; you've act'ally bin runnin' almost! Do come in out o' the sun an' set yourself."

She unfastened the lower half of the door and held it hospitably open.

"Be ye alone?" asked the watchman as he passed into the dusk and coolness of the interior.

"Yes, Lemuel, I'm alone in the shop, but Miss Ashburn is in the back parlor a-waitin' for Mrs. Ross. She's got that nigger monkey with her—For heaven's sake, Lemuel, don't set on that polished table; tables ain't made to set on! Where've you bin?"

The watchman started as though he had been about sitting on a snake, and eyed the table askant with a comical look.

"Where I'm goin' is more to the pint, though where I've been ain't without stirrin' interest," was his answer as he backed away from the offended table and seated himself on the embroidered sofa.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed his wife sharply. "Hain't you got one bit o' sense? A-settin' on Mrs. Vernon's new light sofy, an' you with your dirty street clothes!"

Betsy Ross

The watchman leaped to his feet. Had he been resting on a tack he could not have moved more suddenly.

"If she should see you," continued the lady, "she'd have a conipation fit. There's a skinflint for ye! It's mighty little Betsy Ross can make out o' her kind."

"I guess there ain't no place good enough for me, Susan," said her husband. "I don't see why ye asked me to come in. I guess I'd better stan' up." And with good-natured raillery he stepped away from possible contact with the furniture, and pulled a pipe from his pocket.

"Speakin' o' Mrs. Vernon," he continued, "I just seen that lady on Chestnut Street. She looked like a three-decker under full sail with all guns a-pintin' out. An' a-mentionin' her brings me down to what I stopped in to tell ye. I ain't goin' to be home to-night neither."

With this astonishing piece of information the watchman produced a flint and steel from his pocket and proceeded to strike a shower of sparks.

"Why, where you goin' to be, Lemuel? an' what has Mrs. Vernon got to do with it? Tell me. Land o' Goshen! if the man ain't goin' to light that pipe! Lemuel Bass, have ye taken leave o' your wits? What be you a-thinkin' of? Supposin' Mrs. Ross or Mrs. Vernon should come in an' smell that nasty smell!"

"Well, well, my love!" hastily put in the watchman as he pocketed his pipe, fire and all, "I forgot

The Little Shop

where I was for a minnit. The air and the et cetera o' this place is so dum fine I guess I had better stand outside so's my shadder can't break nothin'. I can tell ye what I want to say from the street, perhaps." And the injured man turned toward the door.

"Don't you be a fool, Lemuel Bass!" said his wife, catching him by his voluminous sleeve and turning him about. "Do behave, an' tell me what you was goin' to. What about Mrs. Vernon?"

"Nothin'."

"Lemuel Bass, you jest said——"

"I just said she reminded me. Now listen, Susan, for I ain't got more'n a week to stan' here an' talk to ye. Rufe Foote's in disgrace, an' 'tis likely I'll get his place."

"Rufe Foote!" exclaimed the lady, holding up both palms. "Who'd a thought it, an' he only bin 'pinted 'sistant constable three months!"

The watchman nodded.

"Well, I'm sorry for Mary Foote, I must say! I remember Rufus Foote when he was a young man, Lemuel—afore I knowed you, my dear; an' once I thought he was tryin' to keep company with me—really, Lemuel, I did, for he uster come night after night to see pa, he said, and he uster set down by the fire an' whittle an' spittle all over the harth an' be so sociable. Why, what's he done?"

"He lost a prisoner Judge Vernon wanted took; an' he had him too—I was there."

Betsy Ross

"Land sakes, Lemuel Bass! You just set right here an' tell me all about it." And the good lady whisked off her apron and spread it over a chair.

"Well," said the watchman as he pulled out his pipe, gave it a regretful look, put it back in his pocket, and crossed his stocky legs, "it was just this way: Judge Vernon come in to the office an' said he wanted a feller arrested, an'——"

"What for, Lemuel?"

"Only for murder."

"*Only* for ——"

"Now look a-here! Are you doin' this, Susan? You remember the killin' of old Ketch, the Quaker sexton? Well, they got their finger on the feller as killed him through old Sam Griscom. I suspect how, but I ain't a-ridin' no theeries; wot I want is fax—f-a-x. Well, Judge Vernon comes in an' he says to the squire, 'That man's name is Bradley an' not Radley.' An' then the squire he sets up straight, an' frowns, an' says, 'Do you mean the patrit what's outfittin' with Capt'in Jones?' An' then the judge takes the squire by the sleeve, an' they go into the next room, a-leavin' me an' Foote to smoke an' wonder. By and by they both come out, an' the squire he says to Foote: 'Arrest on suspicion o' bein' the murderer o' Thomas Ketch one Bradley, alias Radley, an' Lemuel Bass is detailed to act with ye.' An' he gives Foote the warrant. Now, Susan, I'd had suspicions o' that feller for some time, but I lacked fax. Do you remember this?"

The Little Shop

The watchman was getting interested in his own discourse. He unbuttoned his coat and drew from its inside pocket the jeweled dagger he had picked from the snow nearly four years before. It was a beautiful weapon, and the gems sparkled in the dim light of the shop as though each stone held a fire of its own. Mrs. Bass nodded an assent, but slightly recoiled at the sight of the glittering object whose mission was intended to be death, and the watchman replaced it in his pocket.

"I never told the squire about this because I had a theery, an' was waitin' for fax. Nor I didn't sell it, because we won't need the money while I'm on 'arth. It's for you, some day, Susan."

"Massy sakes alive, Lemuel! I'd as soon think of livin' off a snake as that thing! Go on."

"Well, I told Foote I knowed the man, if it was the same Radley as used to be in the slavin' line, an' that I'd bet a side o' bacon I could spot him within an hour. It was half-past 'leven by the clock in Carpenter's Hall, for we stepped in to see, so I told Foote to go to the Bag o' Nails an' I would meet him there in a minnit, an' I run up to the house an' got this." Lemuel Bass tapped his breast pocket. "You'd gone summers, the Lord only knew where. Then down I went to the Bag o' Nails, and what do you think? There set Rufe, all serene, a-talkin' an' drinkin' with the very man he was arter, an' he didn't know it neither, though I knowed him right off. Alongside o' him was a young an' nice-lookin' chap about thirty years old.

Betsy Ross

Fortnitley there wa'n't anybody else in the place. I got Rufe outside, an' told him I'd be dummed if I'd drink the health of a man I was goin' to try to hang, if I was him. He was the most flabbergasted feller you ever saw when he knowed what he'd been doin', an' when I told him how he'd better take his pris'ner—knowin' him to be a fierce feller—he just perked up, Rufe did, and told me to mind my own business, an' said I was his assistant only. Well, Susan, I just throwed up my han's an' let him run his run. He told me to follow him back and do as he commanded, an' I saw that ten to one there was goin' to be a muss, because Rufe ain't no coward if he does lack a little head. Now, what do you think he done? He just takes the warrant in one hand an' a pair of irons in the other, tells me to guard the door an' keep my eye on the other feller, an' we go in. The two were still settin' there. Bradley wa'n't rigged out quite so gay as he was four years ago, but he was a-laughin' at something, an' Susan, I swear to gosh, I was a-most afraid of him then! I never saw him laugh before. Rufe, he walks straight up to him an' he says:

“ ‘Your name is Joseph Bradley, an' I arrest ye on the charge o' murderin'!’ ‘For the murderin' o' who?’ says Bradley, lookin' up as bold as brass, an' laughin' hard. ‘I'll tell ye in a minnit,’ says Rufe, and before you could say ‘scat’ he had that feller in irons. It was about the slickest thing I ever see, an' Bradley, he fairly foamed at the mouth for bein' taken so unexpected. Susan, if I should

The Little Shop

give you the oaths that feller swore the air o' this room 'ud be blue; tobaccy 'ud be sweet to it. Then the other chap says there must be some mistake about it. 'Who are you?' says Rufe. 'I'm Lieutenant Paul Jones, sir,' says he, as neat as wax, 'an' this is my mate. I'll go bail for him.' 'No, ye won't!' says Bradley. 'I'll go bail for myself! You'll see! This is Sam Griscom's doin's, an' he'll pay for it in somethin' besides guineas this time.' I didn't know what he meant then, but I sorter guess a little now. My fax fit the theeries I had. Then I takes this dagger an' I walks up to him, an' says I to myself, 'This'll settle him,' an' I pulls it out. 'Do ye know this?' says I. 'Hello, old mole!' says he; 'why, be ye alive? How many fathoms do ye draw now? That thing! 'Course I knows that thing; it belongs to that shark, Sam Griscom. I saw it on the table of his own caboose the last time I was there—damn his lights! An' he killed Kettle with it—Captain Kettle, alias Ketch. He was a pirate once, an' Griscom was his backer, an' they hated each other bad. Say, old chap, you remember that night! You knows I'm a innercent man! You knows I walked down the hill that night with a feller I pressed—peaceable enough.'

" 'Wot night?' says I.

" 'The night old Ketch was stabbed,' says he.

" 'Who's talkin' about Ketch?' says Rufe; 'you be a-committin' yourself, an' I'll use yer words against ye. Ye had better shut up. Now, come along.'

Betsy Ross

“ ‘I’ll shut up,’ says Bradley, ‘but if I don’t make Sam Griscom sweat for this, I’m a slush bucket!’ Then he turns to Jones, an’ he says, ‘Were you goin’ to that place in Germantown to-night?’

“ ‘Aye,’ says Jones.

“ ‘Then I’ll meet ye there, same as usual,’ says Bradley, with a wink an’ another smile; then he turns to Rufe an’ says: ‘My friend, I don’t suppose this is your fault, but I hold a man a blank fool that goes to jail on his own legs. Ef ye want me ye have to carry me, an’ here I sits till ye do!’

“ Well, Jones says he was goin’ to see about this, an’ goes out, an’ Rufe tells me to get a wheelbarrow, or a wagon, or somethin’ to carry Bradley in, for he wa’n’t goin’ to have either a muss or a argyment about it. I goes out an’ gets a hand cart, an’ when I gets back ther stan’s a crowd around the Bag o’ Nails, an’ the lan’lord grins in my face an’ tells me the pris’ner got escaped.

“ Well, my dear, the way I dropped that cart and cantered to the watchhouse was a caution to fat folks. I was told to go into the private room an’ say my say; an’ there was Rufe with two o’ the purtiest black eyes I ever say, an’ a cut head; an’ the Squire an’ Judge Vernon were standin’ over him an’ a-jawin’ him for losin’ his prisoner. It seems that arter Bradley got rid o’ me an’ Jones—an’ that was what he was tryin’ to do—he stood up an’ makes a low bow to Rufe, an’, presto! his irons was off his wrists an’ in his hands. He swings

The Little Shop

them once onto Rufe's head, which gives him the cut, an' he pastes him one between his eyes with his right fist, an' it must have been awful. When Rufe comes to himself he finds a crowd in the room, his man gone, an' himself lyin' in a corner all blood an' the irons by him. What do ye suppose? He had clapped them onto the feller, *but he hadn't locked them!* That's the reason I thought him so mighty oily about doin' it; an' Bradley knowed it mighty quick, an' he made believe he didn't mighty well."

The watchman paused and wiped his brow, while his wife put her usual period to the narrative.

"Why, the awful! An' what are you goin' to do now, Lemuel?"

"Catch Bradley," said the watchman shortly.

"An' how are you goin' to be promoted into Rufe's shoes?"

"By catchin' Bradley," returned the watchman, with a knowing wink at his spouse. "I've had a theery for some time back, my dear—say four years—but I lacked fax. I got some fax yesterday mornin' when this happened, an' I know what two an' two put together makes."

"I vum, Lemuel! If you don't beat all!" said his wife admiringly. "An' if you gets to be 'sistant constable you'll be home nights, won't you?"

"We won't skin no rabbits till we catch them, my love, but I won't be home for perhaps two or three nights more now, anyway. I've just come from Quaker Griscom's, an' am goin' back to stay

Betsy Ross

there for a night or two. Don't ye see a dazzlin' plot, Susan? Don't ye tell a word to no one. Good-by, my love—I must be a-goin'. Hello! There goes the three-decker! I believe she's comin' here," he added, as the tall figure of Mrs. Vernon, plainly seen through the show window, paused upon the opposite side of the street, as though she contemplated crossing. "I'm off. Give her a broad-side if she flaunts the red flag to ye. Good-by!"

And Lemuel Bass hastened out just as the door of the little back parlor opened, and Mistress Nellie Ashburn, followed by her ebony attendant loaded with bundles, descended into the shop.

CHAPTER XIX

MISTRESS ASHBURN GETS EVEN

MISTRESS ASHBURN was dressed entirely in black. Her face, but slightly paled by time, looked as wholesome by the light of day as it had four years before by the light of her parlor fire. And if four years had made little alteration in the appearance of the spinster, it had made none at all in the small negro that followed her. He had not grown an inch, which increased rather than diminished his value. His eyes were as wondrously rolling, and his round cheeks as round and shining as of old. If he had become sophisticated in the service of his mistress he kept the fact to himself, for to all appearances he was the same fearsome, innocent, and audacious imp that had announced Mr. John Ross, and he held the same propensity for blundering.

The spinster strode into the center of the shop with the air of one perfectly at home.

"Mrs. Ross not returned yet, Bass?" she remarked as she looked about her.

"No," replied the good woman, dropping a half-courtesy. "I don't know what can be keeping her."

"Well, it's all right," replied the spinster.

Betsy Ross

"Scipio Africanus, lay those parcels on that table and be quiet."

The imp did as he was bid; then, putting his forefinger in his mouth and scratching the instep of his right foot with the heel of his left, to the disarrangement of his gilt shoe buckle, leaned his diminutive figure against the back of a chair, rolled his eyes about, and awaited developments.

"Is this my chair, Bass?" asked the spinster as she turned toward the light one with an embroidered seat.

Mrs. Bass believed it was.

"How beautifully done!" said the spinster. "What an art she has! Do you know the charges?"

"A guinea, I think," was the reply.

"A guinea! A guinea for that beautiful work! How absurd! She can't expect to make a living on such prices!"

"I'm afraid she doesn't, Miss," said Mrs. Bass, with a doleful shake of her head.

Mistress Ashburn's temper had not been greatly changed by her grief or the passage of time. She stamped her small foot, and the iron-gray curls hanging from the sides of her bonnet shook like wire spirals.

"Umph! We'll see!" was her impatient retort. "Whose is this, Bass? It looks familiar." And the lady indicated the wreath-embroidered sofa that had so narrowly escaped defilement by the watchman.

"It's Mrs. Vernon's," was the reply. "And

Mistress Ashburn gets Even

she's just crossing the street to come here, I do believe," she concluded, as, turning, she saw the lady in question raise her skirts and step gingerly into the roadway, at the same time calling her negro tiger to follow. Mistress Nellie Ashburn suddenly became all animation, and the eyeglass through which she had been complacently looking closed with a snap.

"What! Dell Vernon! That Tory cat coming here? Scipio Africanus, pick up those bundles, quick! We never meet but we have a fight! I despise her! Come!"

In her nervous ebullience of feeling she swept the bundles into the arms of the negro with one hand, and with the other seized him by the collar and hauled him after her, utterly unconscious that the imp's speed was as nothing to her's, and that his heels were dragging along the floor, his track being marked by falling parcels. In this fashion she hurried toward the stairs leading to the back parlor; but suddenly she halted and released her hold, her tiger going to the floor like a small bale of goods.

"No!" she exclaimed vehemently; "I scorn to run from her! She won twenty guineas of me at ombre the last time we met. I'll get my revenge some way. You little rascal, Scipio Africanus! what do you mean by dawdling? Get those bundles and sit there!" And the excited woman pointed to a stool and shook her finger at the frightened boy. "If you dare fight with that Vernon nigger again," she continued, "I'll skin ye, as sure

Betsy Ross

as God made little apples! Now remember!" Then the spinster faced the door, drew herself up, crossed her arms, and suddenly looked as though temper and dislike were words unknown to her.

Mrs. Bass gazed in wonder at the quick change in the character before her. "Good Lord, what a woman!" was her mental exclamation just as Mrs. Vernon entered the shop, her tiger closing the door behind her. Mistress Ashburn's face took on a look of saintly beatitude, and gliding across the floor with hands extended, she greeted the newcomer effusively.

"Why! Dell Vernon, my *dear*! Where have you been hiding these six months?"

The lady addressed halted, brought up her eyeglass, scanned Mistress Ashburn for a brief second, and returned:

"O Nellie Ashburn! I am pleased—I am delighted! I had not thought to meet you here! We have but lately returned to our town house from our Virginia estate."

"*Indeed!* I am too delighted! Did the Whigs make it uncomfortable for you there, dear?"

"My dear Nell, you can form no idea what a ruffianly set of marauding, murdering guerrillas they are! We were not only *warned*, but positively *threatened*!"

"Dear me!" said the spinster sweetly. "Just think! You might have been *killed*! Are you still as strongly Tory as ever?"

"My love," said Mrs. Vernon, with a toss of

Mistress Ashburn gets Even

her immense headgear and a small spark in her eye, "from *my* point of view I do not see how any *sensible*, self-respecting person can be otherwise."

"You're a nasty thing," was the mental comment of the spinster. Aloud she said, and her smile was a blessed thing to look at.

"Still, you must admit, my love, they were very tolerant to let you get away alive. But doubtless they took into consideration Judge Vernon's strong Whig sentiment, and were forbearing."

The shot stung. Mrs. Vernon stiffened and raised her eyeglass, while a supercilious smile was suggested on the hard mouth as she scanned the little woman before her.

"What remarkable information you do become possessed of, my love! My husband a Whig!"

"And doubtless they knew of your son's sentiments, also, openly stated just before his death," continued the spinster, ignoring the remark of the other.

"Indeed! and who told you that?" asked Mrs. Vernon, her face paling with the anger she was trying to suppress.

"Oh, it was no secret. I had it from Lieutenant Brandon at the time—and others."

"False, quite false, I assure you," said Mrs. Vernon, looking for a way to retreat from the piercing gray eye of her old schoolmate. "I could prove it to you if I cared." This as she swept past her tormentor.

"Oh, it was quite true, I assure *you*," returned

Betsy Ross

Mistress Ashburn, with gathering joy as she marked the discomfort of her victim.

"You are positively insulting, Nell Ashburn!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, as with an accession of intense haughtiness she turned toward the watchman's wife, who had been listening to these amenities of polite society in open-mouthed admiration at the pluck of the little woman who had dared to attack the aristocrat. "I am here to attend to a matter of business. I will return when I am less likely to meet objectionable persons," she remarked, as she stepped toward her attendant, who had taken a stool near Scipio Africanus, and was industriously engaged in making hideous faces in return for those with which he had been at once greeted.

"Does Mrs. Vernon contemplate having the mirrors removed from the shop?" asked the spinster in sweet unconsciousness as she directed her remark to the air.

"Oh, well, Nell Ashburn!" said the great lady, flouncing around in a complete and foolish loss of temper, "I'll have you smart for that! I'll have you——"

She was interrupted by a shriek from Roger Williams, and turned in time to behold him in the clutches of her adversary's footboy, who, maddened by the superior flexibility of his rival's countenance, had set upon him tooth and nail, bearing him to the floor, where, in the moment it took to separate the two, he had sadly rumbled the plumage of the partisan of the house of Vernon.

Mistress Ashburn gets Even

Each lady grasped her retainer by the collar, while, extended at arm's length, both slaves received a vigorous cuffing at the hands of their respective owners, and amid a bedlam of howls from the blacks, and polite imprecations from one lady to the other, Mrs. Vernon ended the highly amusing scene by walking out of the shop, sweeping the tearful and disheveled Roger Williams before her.

Mistress Nellie Ashburn sank into her chair, clasped her hands over her spare bosom, and gave way to uproarious laughter.

"What an awful temper that woman has!" she finally ejaculated as she grew calmer. "My throat is parched! Scipio, go fetch me a drink of water from the well."

"I wouldn't send him," interposed Mrs. Bass. "The bucket is so heavy and he so little he might fall in. I don't mind goin' a mite."

"Bless my soul, so he may! I wouldn't lose him for his weight in gold! How he did trounce that Vernon brat! I'll go. You mind the shop."

And with this the little lady jumped from her chair and hurried after her servant, while Mrs. Bass remarked under her breath, "No wonder her throat is parched!"

The spinster had barely disappeared when Mrs. Ross entered the cool precincts of her own home to find profound peace and the smiling face of her friend, just as she had left it. There was no indication of the war which had recently raged.

Betsy Griscom had been a bud half blown four

Betsy Ross

years before. Pretty, demure, and girlish, Joseph Ashburn had left her, and save that sorrow had made her more mature, so John Ross had found her and made her his own. Now Betsy Ross was a rose fully blown and glorying in her own splendor of perfect womanhood. And yet not a whit of the real beauty of the past had gone. The maturity of twenty-three years bears lightly on the innocent. Perhaps the pink in her clear and still rounded cheeks was not so deep nor so fugitive as of old, but there was a bewitching something in her sweet and serious eyes, something akin to a yearning—a depth, a mystery, that in a woman sets a man's heart aflame and possesses him with a desire to find the cause and give her comfort. She was one to fit all moods. Her beautiful but petite figure might be made for petting and pitying; the mind it incased might be a pillar of strength to lean upon. She was a great uplifter, a helpmeet, a companion, and a plaything at once. Beyond the slight shadow in her eyes there was no trace of grief about her either in face or dress. Close scrutiny might have discovered a past sorrow, but it lay not on her lips, neither in voice nor words. Nor did her costume betray her Quaker origin. Though simple, it was not plain; though faultless in taste, it was not expensive.

She stood a moment and looked about her, smiling at the elder lady; then she placed her parcels on the table, and lifting her hands, took off her small hat and brushed back a few stray ringlets with that

Mistress Ashburn gets Even

peculiar deftness of touch accompanied with a little shake of the head so bewitching in pretty women.

"Whom do you think I saw? What do you think delayed me, Mrs. Bass?" she asked as she undid her parcels and laid a brilliant array of colored silks side by side on the table.

"I ain't got the least idea," said that lady.

"Well, no less a personage than General Washington and his bodyguard."

"Why, you never mean it! I thought he'd gone again. What's he doin' here still?"

"Called to consult with Congress upon some important matter. And they have not finished, I suppose. Among his bodyguard I saw a man who was the image of—but, pshaw—of course not."

"What do you mean, my dear?" asked Mrs. Bass, whose comprehension was not of the liveliest. "I would just love to kiss that man."

"What man?" asked Mrs. Ross in a far-away manner, the skeins of silk dangling unobserved from her hands while her beautiful eyes seemed to see visions beyond the walls of the little shop.

"Why, General Washington, of course, child; just to show how mighty I think he is."

Mrs. Ross came back to the present with a little laugh as sweet as the cry of a thrush. She compared a skein of silk with some work on a tambour frame close by, and remarked demurely:

"Quite impossible, Mrs. Bass. He is the greatest master of retreat that the world has seen. My poor portrait doesn't begin to do him justice, yet it's

Betsy Ross

like him, too. I wish he was not so great, I would ask for a sitting. Did any one call while I was out?"

"Why, bless my soul and body! What can I a-bin a-thinkin' of?" said Mrs. Bass, bustling about. "Miss Ashburn's bin here. Why! She's here now—just at the well for a drink of water. I'll run an' let her know you've come."

And the good woman fluttered out of the room with great ado.

CHAPTER XX

THE SPY

BETSY ROSS bent low in the careful scrutiny she was giving the comparison of colors in the skeins before her. A smile of content was upon her sweet lips, content was in her heart, and she was at peace with the world. There was no indication of trouble to ruffle her smooth forehead, and yet, through the silence, a watchful soul might have heard the footsteps of unrest approaching the little shop from three different directions ; indeed, its forerunner was upon the threshold.

Mrs. Ross's attention was called by a clicking of the latch of the shop door, and as she looked at the newcomer the brooding angel of peace which had shadowed her unfolded its wings and fled. There before the little widow, in muddy and disheveled Quaker garments, hollow-eyed, pale, exhausted, and yet, withal, attractive in her distress, stood her sister Clarissa, whom she had not seen for months. With a hurried and half-tottering movement the bedraggled girl advanced with outstretched arms, and the one word she uttered was eloquent of pleading for love, for mercy and assist-

Betsy Ross

ance—"Bessy!"—and Clarissa threw herself into her sister's arms.

"Clarissa! Sister!" said Mrs. Ross, folding her in close embrace, for the bitterness of apparent desertion by her family had passed from her heart long since. "What is the matter?"

"O Bessy, I am ill! I am heartsick! I am weary!" And within the haven of her sister's bosom the poor girl broke into passionate tears.

"You look ill, my dear," returned Mrs. Ross. "Where have you been? You are tired and travel-stained!"

"Did thee but know how weary and ill, body and mind, thy good heart would grieve for me. I must tell thee all, for thee are my only refuge now that I dare not return home."

"Thee not return home!" said Betsy, falling into the Quaker mode of speech to which her lips had long been unused. "Thee frightens me! When did thee leave home?"

"It is but two days since. Father came home and threatened me. I have been near to Trenton, but they would not let me pass the lines, so I was forced to turn back—where to but here?"

"And what did thee wish beyond Trenton?"

"My husband, Bessy." And Clarissa's head bent low.

Mrs. Ross arose to her feet, for she had sunk on a chair, and her sister was upon her knees by her side. There was wonder and perplexity in her eyes.

The Spy

"Thy husband! Thee are married?"

"Two years ago last November."

"And to whom, Clarissa?"

The stricken girl struggled to her feet. "That I am forbidden to tell thee—or any one. I may only say this: he is an officer in His Majesty's service—a captain. We were secretly married by the chaplain of his regiment, and an officer—his closest friend—was our witness."

Mrs. Ross drew herself to her little height.

"*Thee married a British officer?*"

"O Bessy, he is an American by birth!"

"So much the worse! And thee can not tell his name! Oh, thee has been tricked, duped, poor child! What is the name he now bears, and why did he change his name?"

There was something of both pride and dutiful defiance in the flush that overspread Clarissa's wan face.

"This is unworthy of thee, Betsy. My husband is not a villain, nor has he wronged me in aught. He is Captain Roger Bassett, of the —th Dragoons. As to the change of name, O Bessy, I dare not tell. It is very dreadful, but I loved him so—for four long years. Surely—surely, sister, you do not doubt me—you do not think me a guilty thing!"

"Nay, nay, not that," said Betsy, all misgiving and the least trace of hardness dissolving in the tears that welled from her eyes and ran down her soft cheeks. "Thy trouble is indeed great—greater

Betsy Ross

from the fact that thy husband is a soldier—a man of violence and bloodguiltiness——”

“Bloodguiltiness!”

“Why, yes; so Friends say of soldiers, do they not? Father is a stern and rigid man; he will disown thee even as he did me.”

“I know, I know. Father has but just found it out, and in a way I know not. His will is of granite. Though he did not actually cast me off then, he will, he will. And what am I to do?”

“Poor, suffering child! But your husband——”

“I wrote to him, Bessy, and sent it by messenger. I told him I was ill and in trouble, and that I would find shelter here.”

“And so thee shall,” said her sister, all the loyalty in her nature coming to the surface as she put her arms around the sufferer. “No matter what father may think, what the Meeting may think, what the world may think, thee are my sister first, last, and always. Hush!” she continued, laying her finger on Clarissa’s lips as she listened a moment. “Miss Ashburn is within. I would not have her know of this. Remain quietly here until I can get her out. This way! Quick, Clarissa!”

And Mrs. Ross pulled aside a hanging of heavy stuff used for curtaining, motioning her sister behind it as she heard the voice of her friend in the back parlor; then dropping the folds, she ran up the little stairway in time to intercept the spinster ere she opened the door.

It might have been well had Mistress Ashburn

The Spy

forestalled Mrs. Ross and stepped into the little shop ere Clarissa could have been concealed. The red cloak had sown deeply the seeds of trouble, and already had been reaped the red crop of murder, and yet the harvest of misunderstanding and heartbreak had not been all gathered. It might have been that the seed had never come to maturity had the spinster not beguiled Betsy to remain in the back parlor, where Mrs. Bass joined them, leaving the shop to silence and the hidden girl.

For a time Clarissa stood behind the folds of the drapery choking her sobs as she realized the comfort of loving protection and the security of her haven. She could hear nothing but the ticking of the clock or the sound of some passer as his boot heels clicked on the now hot pavement, though once or twice there came through the quiet air the cry of a Germantown peddler calling his wares: "Fresh wegtables: it vas ratish, vaterkress, lettis, und peas!"

The brooding silence comforted her. She even thought of sitting on the floor and giving way to drowsiness when she heard the rattle of the door latch, and cautiously looking from her place of concealment, she saw a man enter the shop. It was at once evident that the person was not a customer, or even an habitual caller, for he plainly showed how unfamiliar were his surroundings. He rapidly scrutinized every corner of the room, and his actions, far from being those of an honest man, had a certain unmistakable stealthiness. He glided rather

Betsy Ross

than stepped within, unslinging from his back a large basket heavy with vegetables. In dress he was a German, for the blue cap and blouse, and his heavy wooden-soled, mud-covered shoes, that clanked along the floor for all the care he gave to his stepping, proclaimed him one of the numerous and thrifty Pennsylvania Dutch who made Philadelphia a market for their garden truck. Whatever the man's errand might be, it was evidently not for thieving that he had penetrated the upholstery shop, for he put his hands in his pockets and looked about him like one who merely wished to satisfy his curiosity. Clarissa looked at him for a moment or two, but the glare from the street dazzled her eyes, and the fellow made no move to advance or retreat from the shadow within which he had placed himself. At that moment Judge Vernon went by on the opposite side of the way, pacing slowly through the hot sunshine, his hands clasped behind him and his head bowed, as though in deep thought. The vegetable vendor drew his body still further into the shadow, though he craned his head forward and looked hard at the passing man. At the movement and the fall of light upon the intruder's face Clarissa Griscom gasped, then she flung back the curtain that covered her, and hastening into the center of the room, ejaculated:

"Clarence!"

The peddler turned as though shot, and in an instant Clarissa was in the arms of her husband.

Even in the intense satisfaction of being there,

The Spy

her wifely instinct more than her knowledge warned her of the danger incurred by her husband in penetrating the American lines in disguise. She drew herself from him and scanned him closely, giving him the care and attention that she herself stood greatly in need of at that moment.

"Clarence! Clarence!" she protested. "Thee should not have done this. I did not expect my letter to bring thee to me here! Dost thou not know the terrible danger?"

"Did you not know the measure of my love?" he returned. "I have been in a torment of suspense. I did not know what might have happened you—ill, alone, and probably afoot."

"Yes, afoot most of the way. I came the West Jersey road."

"And I was not far from the lines when I received word from you. I crossed at Trenton and bought these of a Dutch gardener." And Vernon indicated his clothes and the basket. "The way is infested with bad characters. I did not know what had happened—only that you were to be here."

"Aye, thank God, I am here and safe! But I can not talk to thee in this place. Thee will be seen, recognized, and taken for a spy."

The young man straightened himself.

"I *am* a spy. I could not else get leave, and so volunteered to come into the city—that I might see you. My love were little at this time if I would not take the risk."

Betsy Ross

The girl shrank as she stood face to face with the acknowledged fact of her husband's danger, but her look of fondness was almost a look of worship as she gazed on him.

"Oh, I fear for thee! If caught, what horror would come of it! They would surely shoot thee!"

"Hardly that," returned Vernon, with a grim smile. "They would only hang me. But you know the old recipe for cooking hare—first catch him. I'm safe in this disguise, though I dare not go to my own home and compromise my father, who just now passed. My secret is yours only. Do not trust it even to your sister."

"I promise."

"Are you to stop here?"

"Yes. My sister——"

"God bless your sister for it! Listen; I have but a moment to stay. I will remain hereabouts safely hidden until you are through your illness. I will pass with my basket daily and call my wares. I can do it well. A crumpled note thrown from the window—— My God! Here is my mother!"

He broke off suddenly, and husband and wife stared at each other in pale-faced consternation. There was no mode of concealment handier than the curtain even had not the suddenness of the interruption paralyzed the couple. Had the intruder been a stranger, or, for that matter, any one else in the world, the wit of Vernon might have been equal

The Spy

to the occasion, but he knew too well the absurdity of playing a part in the hope of deceiving the gimlet eye of his parent, who, with her hand upon the latch, hesitated a moment as she scowled after the distant figure of her husband.

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. VERNON MEETS DEFEAT

MRS. VERNON was warm, and the heat of the day, with her, had been augmented by a half hour's brooding over the treatment she had received at the hands of Mistress Ashburn. Instead of cooling, her choler had risen, and was still waxing under the too late marshaling of the many things she might have said with crushing effect—had she but thought of them in time. With her increasing bitterness it became harder and harder for her to accept the situation. Indeed, she would not be vanquished by and leave the field to a woman, who, as she internally expressed it, had not the wit to get herself a husband. She had boxed her tiger's ears in the public street and sent him home that she might concentrate her energies on her enemy, and, in the words of Lemuel Bass, she was a three-decker under full canvas as she entered the shop. How well Clarence Vernon knew his mother was at once disclosed as that lady walked up to the couple she saw standing within, and raising her lorgnette, asked sweetly:

"Pardon me, but can you inform me if Mrs. Ross has—— Good Lord!"

The eyeglass and the affectation of the lady fell

Mrs. Vernon meets Defeat

together in the start she gave, for it had taken but half a glance for her to recognize her son.

"Have no fear, mother; there are none but friends here!" exclaimed Vernon quickly, laying his hand upon his mother's arm. "I have but just arrived. You knew, of course——"

"And is *this* the way you were to appear in Philadelphia?" said the lady, interrupting him and drawing herself up with a look of injury, though her stately demeanor relaxed sufficiently to allow her to present her cheek to her long-unseen son. "Your father received a letter from you which he has not yet vouchsafed to show me—*me*, your mother; but he has condescended to inform me that you have taken it upon yourself to marry without consulting your parents and that you were about coming to Philadelphia to see your wife."

The lady pursed up her mouth and assumed the air of one deeply injured.

"My dear mother," said the son, with a slight knitting of the brows, "I was hardly in a position to speak to you before, and as for coming here as I am, did you look for me in full regimentals? I tell you I am among friends."

"Friends! I presume you mean Quakers," she returned, with a scornful glance at the disordered girl by his side. "You are disguised. Possibly you are a——" She hesitated as though the word was distasteful.

"Spy. Yes," he assented, filling out the sentence and answering it at once.

Betsy Ross

"They might have selected some one else. Do you not know the risk to your father and to me—and to yourself?" she added. "I was proud of you as an officer serving his king, but a *spy!*" There was scorn in the word.

"The fault, if it is a fault, is mine," returned the young man, shrugging his shoulders. "I asked for the position that I might see my wife, who is ill. I will try to see you at another time, mother, but now——"

"Body o' me!" said the lady impatiently. "Then what are you doing here? Who is the paragon for whom I am to step aside—this piece of perfection whom I am to call my daughter without consultation—whether or no? Upon my soul, young man, you have strange notions of the duties of a son!"

"I may have a misconception of my duties as a son," returned Vernon, with a sudden light in his eye. "I was not taught in a liberal school; but I have no doubts as to my duties as a husband. Mother, let me introduce you to my wife."

And with the air of a courtier he took the trembling girl by the hand, advanced one step, and bowed to his parent.

The lady appeared changed to stone. She made no movement to return the graceful courtesy swept by the girl in deference to her husband's mother, or the respectful bow of her son. Her back might have stiffened a trifle. Her arms had been crossed and there might have been something of a tremble to the

Mrs. Vernon meets Defeat

lorgnette as she slowly brought it to her eyes, but by the way her look flashed from her son to the woman by his side, taking in with a sweep, and a probable eye to details, the dress and face of the girl, it was plain that she had not absorbed the fact as given, but was rather resenting what, in her mind, was intended as a joke.

"Surely you jest!" she replied, with added *hauteur*. "And is a jest due me at this time?"

"It would be a sorry jest, I fear, and one most illy timed," answered her son, still holding Clarissa by the hand, his face, which had expressed all gentleness, growing hard as he marked the attitude of his mother.

"Who is this person?"

"I have already told you; she is my wife."

Mrs. Vernon's eyes were furious, but she asked, with rising sarcasm:

"Who *was* this person, then, since you insist on nice distinctions?"

"Mother! mother! surely——"

"Sir, answer me!" she interrupted, with a stamp and a sudden ebullition of temper.

The young man set his teeth.

"This lady, madam, is a little Quakeress whom I love with all my heart, and who, in marrying me, conferred the highest honor I am capable of receiving. She is Clarissa, the daughter of Samuel Griscom."

Clarissa flashed a look of extreme devotion at her husband, and Mrs. Vernon one of extreme dis-

Betsy Ross

gust at both. The latter lady had slipped the leash of her temper, while her affectation and the veneer of polish fell from her, leaving her nature plain to the eye.

"A trollop! A baggage! A street drab, by her looks!" she exclaimed hotly. "The sister of the disowned upholsteress!—a person in trade! To think that a son of mine should sink so low! Do you imagine I will receive her—her? Good God above us! And your father knew; no wonder he dared not—he *dared* not tell me!"

"For Heaven's sake stop, mother! Have some consideration. Remember at least who you are. I demand respect shown my wife!" said the young man, controlling himself yet speaking warmly as he passed his arm about the waist of Clarissa, who, under the weight of the denunciation, was ready to sink to the floor.

"Madam, I am, and always was, honest. Thee wrongs thyself as well as me in speaking thus," said Clarissa, endeavoring through her weakness to present an undaunted front.

"The devil take your thees and thous!" returned Mrs. Vernon with a coarseness that obtained even among great ladies in those days; a heritage from the time of Queen Elizabeth.

"Where were ye married?"

"Here in Philadelphia more than two years ago," returned her son, flushed with shame for his mother.

"And have ye complied with the law? Have

Mrs. Vernon meets Defeat

ye made the marriage a matter of record in the town hall? Have ye damned yourself entirely?"

Vernon was slightly taken aback, though he straightened himself. "No, to both questions, madam. I am not damned, but glorified. As for the record, it has been deferred for reasons—you see there were reasons—until——"

Mrs. Vernon snapped her fingers in venomous triumph. "Ah-ha-a-a! Thirty days is the limit of time for that! It is a very simple matter. I am glad to know that my son is circumspect! Leave it to me; I will arrange it!"

"Arrange what?" asked the stupefied young man.

"I suppose the lady is in possession of your real name," she continued, ignoring his question. "Leave it to me. Your father has lost but little influence; he will attend to the matter."

"About what are you talking?" demanded Vernon harshly, with growing suspicion.

"I mean that I understand your alliance with this creature, and I shall see you freed. This marriage shall be happily annulled."

"Mother, have you gone mad? This poor, ill, and suffering girl is my wife—my *wife*, I tell you, madam; and as such you shall respect her. She is as good as I am—aye, a thousand times better!"

"The gutter drab has come between me and my plans—and no one does that and escapes me. I would rather see you in your grave than bound irrevocably to her."

Betsy Ross

"And I would go there before I would marry the woman you have in mind—or even in thought wrong this girl."

"Lord help me, my son is a fool!" exclaimed the lady, dashing her mask to the floor and snapping her glasses in her rage and disappointment. "You will go there earlier than you think if you do not begone from here! Your disguise is miserable, and your face no stranger in Philadelphia. Your charming wife must love you well to keep you here. By the Lord, I could spit upon her!"

The taunt was exactly the fillip the fainting girl needed. At the hint of danger she roused herself, and ignoring the irate woman, who was upon the point of losing the last shred of her self-respect by literally carrying out her implied threat, she turned to her husband, who by this was quivering with poorly repressed rage, and laying her hands upon his shoulders, she said, quietly and sweetly:

"Go thee must, Clarence, for my sake as well as for thine own. I care little for these mouthings, but it is not good for thee or me."

"Aye, I will go," he returned with a fondness that fed the fury of his mother. "She is but a woman in a rage. If she wrongs thee, I will right it a thousand times."

"Oh, I will be ever sure of that; but go—go—some one is coming. God guard thee!" And with a quick embrace she turned away, a martyr to her affection.

Clarence Vernon picked up his basket, slung the

Mrs. Vernon meets Defeat

broad black strap over his shoulder, and without a word to his mother, hurried out. Presently was heard the cry, "Fresh wegtables: it vas radishes, vaterkress, lettis, und peas!" And as the sound penetrated the now quiet room, with a quick gush of tears the girl stepped behind the curtain which had before hidden her, leaving Mrs. Vernon an astonished woman, when, upon turning around to empty more vials of wrath upon the now defenseless Clarissa, she found she was alone.

At that moment the door of the back parlor opened and Mrs. Ross appeared upon the step. As she saw Mrs. Vernon she gave a quick look about her, and hurriedly ran down the stairway, greeting the lady with a pleasant smile.

But Mrs. Vernon was in no humor for pleasure or pleasantries. With a stony face she accepted the welcome, and said:

"This is my sofa, I see, Mrs. Ross. What are your charges?"

"Do you like it?" asked Betsy.

"It does very well for America. One would scarcely expect what one sees in Lunnon, you know," said the lady icily.

The little woman recoiled.

"I am sorry you are not pleased."

"Oh, it will *do*, no doubt. And the charges?"

"Are two pounds."

"Two pounds! Two *pounds*!" loudly exclaimed the lady, discovering a chance for a combat where all the advantages would be with her. "Well, you

Betsy Ross

may not equal Lunnion workmanship, but you exceed their prices! Half the sum would be ample."

It was not in Mrs. Ross's nature to protest loudly. The look of intense scorn that passed over her face contained more eloquence than anything she could have said. Her silence seemed to shout her sudden contempt for her customer as loudly as it proclaimed her own real superiority. It so worked upon the lady that she was about to open her purse and close the incident when the last straw was added to the peculiar burden she had carried.

"What, dear Dell! Do we meet again?" said Mistress Ashburn, who had heard the conversation through the open parlor door, and seeing her chance, glided softly down to take part in the dispute. "Oh! Mrs. Ross, is this my chair?" she asked, with an air of innocence, picking up an elaborately embroidered one and bringing it forward.

"Yes, Miss Ashburn."

Mistress Ashburn stepped off and looked admiringly at the delicate work.

"Very prettily done! I saw nothing to equal it when I was in London! Lovely! isn't it, Dell?" And with an acquisition of childlike simplicity she turned to her rival.

Mrs. Vernon looked blank.

"If you will tell me the price I will pay you now, Mrs. Ross," continued the spinster sweetly, with a broad wink at her *protégée*, which was entirely lost on the little widow.

Mrs. Vernon meets Defeat

"A guinea, Miss Ashburn," returned Betsy, with a hopelessly puzzled look.

"A guinea! Oh, my dear! Absurd! Ridiculous! You do not mean that!"

Mrs. Ross shrank back abashed. "Indeed, Miss Ashburn, I did not think—indeed, the materials cost——"

"I have given you much work, Mrs. Ross," said the spinster with mock severity. "I know what is right, and right wrongs no one."

Mrs. Vernon unbent. The generous Mistress Ashburn was showing the shady side of her character. She should be encouraged.

"Well, Nell Ashburn, you have come to your senses at last, I am glad to see. Her charges are ridiculous."

"Indeed they are," returned the spinster with a toss of her head, a gesture that was usually a warning to her intimates.

Betsy Ross had never been in a similar situation. Her little heart fluttered under her small bodice. She felt like a lamb between two wolves.

"And—and what would you consider a fair price, Miss Ashburn?" she faltered.

"Well, I should say *two* guineas," said that lady.

Mrs. Vernon threw up her hands. "*Two* guineas! Why, she only asked one!"

"I know perfectly well what her price is, my dear Dell, but my sense of justice will not allow me to rob struggling women and children who know less about these things than I do. Good-morning,

Betsy Ross

marm." And Mistress Ashburn, still smiling like an angel, again bestowed a tremendous wink upon Mrs. Ross, laid down a couple of shining coins, and sailed away into the back parlor without turning her head.

The well-shaken wrath of Mrs. Vernon could stand no more. Her position was untenable. To speak further would be to break down entirely, so with a tacit admission of defeat she drew forth two pounds, dropped them on the seat of the sofa, and with the remark, "I will send for the thing," retreated from the store in fairly good order for one so thoroughly beaten.

CHAPTER XXII

FROM THE DEAD

As the door closed behind Mrs. Vernon, Betsy crossed the room, flew up the little stairway, and thrust her head into the back parlor. As she had hoped, but scarcely expected, the room was empty. Through the broad, low window that filled the space under the open stairway leading above she could see Mistress Ashburn and Mrs. Bass in animated gossip by the well, while from a great gourd held to his face the ebony tiger was filling his mouth with water in one breath and squirting it in a fine shower from between his teeth in the next. The coast was clear. In a strident whisper she called her sister, who ran hurriedly from her concealment, and at that moment there came from the street the noisy tramp of a number of horses, the confused beating of their hoofs mingling with the metallic clanking of sabres and accoutrements.

“Get thee upstairs, Clarissa, dear. I dare not leave the shop open and alone while troops are passing. I will be with thee as soon as possible. Take the spare chamber to the right and rest thee.”

She waited long enough to see her sister wearily climb the stairway, and her whole tender heart went

Betsy Ross

out to the poor sufferer as she marked her painful progress until she had disappeared. Then turning, she descended into the shop and was picking up the coins Mrs. Vernon had thrown on the sofa when she realized that the cavalcade had stopped before her own door, and that even as she looked up the figure of an officer clad in the uniform of the Continental army was advancing into the shop.

He came forward in a blind fashion, for the room was comparatively dark and in sharp contrast with the white glare of the street. For a moment, therefore, he was incapable of marking details, only being conscious that he was in the presence of a lady. With a graceful lifting of his hat he bowed and said:

"Lieutenant Wheatly, madam; from General Washington. At your service." He straightened his erect figure and continued: "The general presents his compliments to Mrs. John Ross, and—madam, are you ill?"

The exclamation was justified. As Betsy heard the name of the self-introduced officer she made a deep courtesy—a courtesy unsurpassed for grace. The name of Washington (without its present talismanic value) stirred the little lady as would the name of a hero stir the impressionables of the present generation. The formal presentment of the great man's compliments fell on her ear as words only for the moment, for as she completed her genuflexion she threw a bewitching glance at the handsome young man. And then her strength suddenly

From the Dead

left her and she clutched the table near her in time to prevent falling. There, before the eyes of the stricken woman, stood, to all appearances, her former lover, Joseph Ashburn, but his face bore no look of kindly recognition, for sun blindness was still upon him. He stepped forward to assist her, but she supported herself with one hand upon the table, and with the other over her fluttering heart made a violent effort to control herself.

"No, I—I am not ill. It—it was the name—Washington." She faltered as she stared in amazement at the ghost before her. "You say, sir, that he—that General Washington presents his compliments to Mrs. Ross—to me?" And with the weight of the honor, the peculiar and unusual trials of the morning, and the flood of old recollections, God only knew how dear to her heart, the shaken girl, completely overcome, half turned from the officer and burst into a flood of tears. As she swung away from the man and buried her face in her hands she did not notice the violent start he made as he got the first clear glimpse of her face and heard the tones of her voice. His agitation was none the less genuine, though held under almost complete control, and as the girl recovered herself and turned toward him to apologize for her emotion, she encountered a face as pale as her own and eyes as appealing, albeit there were no tears in them. In an instant there rushed over her the certainty of his identity. Assertions and denials; possibilities, probabilities, and evidence became jumbled in her

Betsy Ross

now active brain ; but without regard to logic, she felt that she could point her finger at him and say, "Thou art the man!" and from her very certainty and the pain it engendered, she remained silent about all save his errand.

"Madam," he answered stiffly, "my message is genuine, but I can not understand why this should so trouble you."

Pride and resentment came to Betsy's rescue at thus being disclaimed, and with a heightened color, forced volubility, and a manner half-hysterical, she answered him.

"Of course you can not understand ; how could you—you who are with him every day? But we passive rebels—we women—idealize him, perhaps. Sir," she continued, gaining confidence as she proceeded, and with a meaning look wielding the lash, "sir, are not truth—self-sacrifice—nobility—constancy—constancy of purpose, traits for any woman to worship? Do you not agree with me, Lieutenant—Lieutenant—the name has slipped me." And she smiled. The red spot glowing in each cheek, the white teeth, the ruby of her lip, and the clear sparkle that showed in her beautiful brown eyes and spoke of strained nerves, made her a bewitching picture.

The young man looked at her stonily, though within he was all riot. Mechanically he answered, with another bow, "Wheatly, madam ; Nathaniel Wheatly, of Boston." And he passed his hand over his brow.

"Oh, of Boston! A native?" asked Betsy,

From the Dead

with the keen enjoyment of a cat worrying its prey, though at the same moment she felt as though the world was slipping from her. "I—you at first reminded me of an old friend. I—you of course have never seen me before?" This with a gentle arching of her eyebrows. The officer wet his lips and spoke hoarsely, though with deference.

"Madam, I never met a Mrs. Ross before in my life, and this is my first visit to Philadelphia."

The mental protest of the poor girl was almost articulate. Oh, what terrible reason is there for this? was her dumb cry as she marked the look of suppressed agony go over the young man's face. He was not drowned—not dead. To her it seemed a farce for them to stand before each other in this fashion, and a cruelty to torture him further, and yet his attitude toward her appeared an insult. Why should he not acknowledge her? The few words that had passed between them, however, had allowed her to regain much of her self-possession.

"Pardon my interruption, sir. I was naturally startled at your message and a supposed likeness to an old—friend. You were about to say——"

Without removing his eyes from her face the officer answered:

"That General Washington, accompanied by Mr. George Ross——"

"My late husband's uncle! Oh, yes!"

The soldier's eyes snapped as though a flame had crossed them, and his hat dropped from his hand in the start he gave.

Betsy Ross

"Your *late* husband, madam! Do I understand you are a widow?"

"Your understanding is correct, sir," returned the girl unpitifully. "But it is a matter with which you can have no interest. Proceed, if you please."

"Madam, you are right. Accept my apology," returned the abashed man as he stooped for his hat. "My message is to the effect that the general, accompanied by Mr. Ross and Mr. Morris, both of Congress, will call within the hour upon a matter of importance, of the nature of which I am ignorant. My orders are simply to keep this house clear of spectators."

As the girl heard the old familiar tones linked to this cold formality, it seemed as though her heart must burst. She looked with wonder on the man, unable to break from the charm or wake from the dream. Was she dreaming? Could she be mistaken? Were two men, unrelated, ever so alike in voice, gesture, looks, movements, and that subtle something which only the eye of love discerns? Impossible! And yet equally impossible that her old lover—the memory of whom she still worshiped secretly—could stand before her and deny her. She seemed to be sinking away, and might have fairly fainted under the strain, had she not been stimulated by a sudden thought which brought her to herself. She would confront him with his aunt. With a courtesy, the depth of which was due much more to weakness than to deference, and from which she

From the Dead

struggled to recover without betraying herself, she said :

“ Pardon me, sir ; there is one to whom I must communicate your tidings. Will you not be seated and await my return ? ” And without tarrying for an answer, with a mighty effort she crossed the room and went into the parlor.

If Betsy Ross had held a real doubt as to the identity of her caller, and had stooped to spying, she might have settled the question at once, for as the door closed behind her the officer almost fell into the chair nearest him and covered his face with his hands. But this sign of weakness was but momentary, for he instantly sprang to his feet, and with deep interest began examining the objects about him.

“ Aye ! ” he muttered, “ it is her work. I might have known it ! I might have expected it ! God ! what black chance sent me here ? What can it mean but misery ? ”

And misery it evidently meant to him, for had Betsy had an eye on the interior of her little shop she might have beheld the officer come to a stand before a headless block about which was a lovely piece of lacework, and gaze upon it with mournful eyes. She might have heard his mutterings had her ears been sharpened to them, and might have marked him pick up the edge of the lace and bestow a reverent kiss upon the weblike and senseless material. He wheeled about with compressed lips as he heard the door reopen ; nor could any pen do justice to his

Betsy Ross

mental state when he saw Mistress Ashburn and Mrs. Ross walk down the steps and advance to meet him.

Beyond the fact that there was an emissary from General Washington waiting in the shop, the spinster had not been informed as to what she might expect.

"Hoity-toity, child! We are getting to be a person of consequence," was her playful retort as she walked toward the parlor door in blissful ignorance of the shock awaiting her, and as she went daintily down the steps and approached the officer the last thing in the world she expected to encounter was her nephew or his ghost. She, too, coming in from the blinding light of the yard, could not at first clearly see the face of the man. As Betsy formally introduced the two, watching her friend with careful scrutiny, the maiden lady made the usual deep courtesy, and, like her *protégée*, was caught midway by surprise. However, she was not to be overwhelmed, and, as she recovered herself with but a slight sense of awkwardness, she cast a look of absolute consternation on Betsy, a quick glance of mingled wonder and reproach, and, with an appearance of self-possession, addressed herself to the young man, albeit her apologetic laugh at her own awkwardness was decidedly forced.

"Ha—ha—ha! How ridiculous! How absurd! I usually do it much better than that! And are you risen from the dead? What is this for, Joseph?—I mean, are you sure you are really Mr.

From the Dead

Wheatly? Good God! what am I about? Pardon me, young man, the likeness is——”

The good lady stopped and stared in open wonder at the passive features of the now imperturbable officer.

“There is a strong likeness to some one, I am led to believe,” he said with a slight bow and in a voice that went to the heart of the maiden lady and caused the tears to leap to her eyes. In undisguised wonder, and regardless of the commonest laws of politeness, she stared into his face, her lips moving but making no sound; then, with a wonderful light on her countenance, she approached him slowly like one fascinated, and as slowly spoke to him.

“Forgive the impertinence of an old woman, sir, whose heart has been buried at the bottom of the Delaware for nigh four long years. Are ye not Joseph Ashburn?”

“Madam, I am Lieutenant Wheatly—Nathaniel Wheatly. I am here on an errand from General Washington.”

“And is General Washington coming here?”

“Within the hour, madam.”

“Sir, you are the dead alive!” she continued appealingly, holding out her arms. “You would not have the heart to deny those who love thee most deeply. Sir—young man—you are the image of my lost boy, for whom I have ached, and for whose soul I yet pray. Look at me—look at this little woman! Oh, sir, I can not bear it!” And Mistress Ashburn threw herself into Betsy’s arms.

Betsy Ross

For a moment the soldier stood as stiffly as if on parade, the beads of perspiration growing upon his forehead being due to more than the heat of the day. With a hoarse "Pardon me!" he strode toward the door, while two great tears which he hastily brushed from his eyes as he walked, spoke of the strain on his sympathies. As he passed into the street the ladies separated, and Betsy spoke.

"Of—of course, he is not Joseph. I at first thought he was; any one would know that it couldn't be—but the likeness is so startling."

"At first, yes," said the sobbing spinster. Then they both looked at each other, and, with a final burst of tears, Betsy and Mistress Ashburn again embraced.

"I tell you it *is* Joseph," said the elder lady, with sudden asperity, as she released herself from her companion and resolutely wiped her eyes. "I know it! He can deny it all he wants to! He is *not* dead! I *know* it! And I'll get it out of him. Leave it to me; I'll find the reason, and it must be a good one to have him deny me!"

"Good for you, perhaps," was the half-sorrowful, half-resentful reply. "Now, he has either repented his love for me, or—you know what happened the night he disappeared. It could not be that!"

"No, no, not that!—not Ketch! He never *could* be guilty of it! There was no motive. I'd sooner believe he'd made way with Clarence Ver-

From the Dead

non!" cried the poor woman, shaking her head with violence.

"Well, he has denied me privately when he might have spoken. Now he has denied you."

"Never you mind. I will get the truth from him."

"How will you?"

"By making him call and confess—leave it to me."

"Get the truth—and keep it, my dear friend," returned Betsy abruptly, trying to look hard and uncompromising. "I do not wish it. I have some pride left, and it will not permit me to listen to any explanation of Lieutenant Wheatly's—even were it made to me, much less to another. Even being alive, Joseph Ashburn is now dead to me."

There was no time for further confidences, for the officer re-entered the room with a step that showed he had regained his mental poise, and he faced the two females, whose words, looks, and actions showed that they too had marshaled their forces for offense or defense.

"Sir," said the maiden lady, as the soldier approached, "you will pardon the effect of—of this case of mistaken identity. Why is General Washington showing this preference? I have been liberal to the cause, yet he would not call upon me."

"He would be honored, madam, I am sure," returned the lieutenant stiffly.

"And if not himself, being a busy man, do you

Betsy Ross

think he would call by proxy, in the person of, say, Lieutenant Nathaniel Wheatly?"

The officer bowed. "Lieutenant Wheatly would be more than honored."

"Then he shall be, and in form," said the lady, triumphantly and with forced gayety, as she opened her reticule and took out a pack of playing cards with plain white backs. "Have you the style in Boston, sir," she continued, "of writing invitations on the backs of playing cards?" *

"I believe not," returned the young man with a melancholy smile.

"Quite the fashion here, and, I do assure you, a pretty and appropriate fashion, too. What card shall I select for this gentleman, my dear?" asked Mistress Ashburn, turning to Betsy.

Mrs. Ross flashed her eye on the officer as she answered promptly:

"The knave of hearts, aunt, dear."

"Aye, that is even better than the king of clubs," said the spinster, noting, with secret satisfaction, the sudden flush that came over the officer's face.

"A desperate thrust that, madam," said he, with a bending of his head. "But I bow to the decision."

"Sir, you will receive an invitation from a lady to call upon her. Did you win your spurs, sir? You see I am a lion-hunter, lieutenant."

* A fashion prevalent in Philadelphia during the Revolution.

From the Dead

"I was told I deserved them, madam."

"I would be a proud woman if an Ashburn could say the same."

There was a courtly grace in the man as he answered, "I feel certain an Ashburn would have done no less than have I."

"You are courteous, sir. Let me add that had it been my nephew instead of yourself, I should have saluted him for the distinction he conferred on the family."

"He would be less appreciative than I, did he not consider the reward greater than his deserts."

"I will take ye at your word, young man!" And with that the spinster threw her arms about her nephew's neck and kissed him soundly on his cheek. The soldier stepped back a pace in absolute surprise, but there was no displeasure on his face as he turned to Betsy and, with another irreproachable bow, said:

"Dare I ask if Mrs. Ross shares this interest in the Ashburns?"

Betsy turned red and pale by turns at the words that cut like a knife.

"Beyond my friend here, not in the slightest degree," she answered, lowering her eyes and turning her head.

"Ah, it was too much to hope!" he answered contritely.

"Do not misunderstand me, sir," said Betsy, returning to the charge. "The man honors the name, not the name the man. A name, like an old

Betsy Ross

garment, may be cast aside, but the man must answer for his acts to his conscience and his God."

The thrust was final. Ashburn gazed on his old love for a moment with his heart in his eyes; then, with a bow and a step backward, he said:

"True! It can not be successfully controverted. Ladies, your servant to command." And turning, he marched out of the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FLAG COMMITTEE

MISTRESS ASHBURN'S look was one of triumph, Betsy's of sorrowful indignation, but neither lady had time to exchange words, for, hardly had the officer left the house when a few faint huzzas were heard in the distance mingled with loud words of command close at hand, and ere Mistress Ashburn had fairly escaped into the parlor, Lieutenant Wheatly re-entered the room with a squad of men, who, at a word, formed a lane leading from the entrance and remained standing at "Attention!"

There was a moment of suspense, then a command, the snap of a dozen carbines coming to "Present!" the quick flash of the officer's sword as the hilt rose to his forehead, and down the human aisle walked three gentlemen, the leader a man of at least six feet in height and appearing much taller, in full uniform of buff and blue, and Betsy knew she was standing in the presence of the committee from Congress and the commander-in-chief of the Continental forces, General Washington.

The little woman sank nearly to the floor in a deep courtesy, and was so entirely absorbed in contemplation of the great man that she hardly noticed

Betsy Ross

her uncle as he advanced and took her by the hand.

"Elizabeth, my dear niece, at my suggestion you are chosen for singular honors. We represent Congress. As a committee from that body we have called on you. His Excellency will explain."

Washington bowed gravely, put his hand into his pocket and drew out a paper, but before unfolding it, or proceeding to the business that brought him, he turned to his aide.

"Lieutenant, you will retire with your squad and see that we suffer from no interruption," and then calmly waited until the officer had saluted and followed his men from the room.

In that moment Betsy felt a sense of disappointment. Unknown to herself, she was suffering from the discovery that her idolized god was a man like other men. She would have admitted that she expected no less, yet none the less was her idol shattered as an ideal. Though her reverence for her country's hero was scarcely less, it was strange to her that he spoke as other men spoke, and that fact gave her confidence in herself. Had Washington been an ambitious and unscrupulous politician and surrounded himself with a glittering retinue; had he carried ceremony to extremes and held himself above her, Betsy might have had her ideal realized; she might have trembled before him, and, unwittingly, have respected him less. There was nothing affected in his manner as he turned and spoke to her.

The Flag Committee

"Madam, it is not to your good uncle alone that I am indebted for a knowledge of your fame."

"Indeed, Your Excellency!" replied Betsy, with a vivid blush.

"No! Colonel Cadwallader has informed me that the beautiful standard of his Philadelphia Light Horse is your handiwork." Then, turning to Mr. Morris, as Betsy courtesied: "The most marvelously wrought flag in the army, sir, but too ornate for a national standard. Mrs. Ross, do you think you could fashion a flag from a design we will present?"

It was the first intimation that Betsy had received of the nature of the visit that has placed her name in American history. By this time she was thoroughly self-possessed, and answered brightly enough:

"I do not know, Your Excellency, but I can try."

"To try is to do, with you, I believe," said Washington kindly. Then, seating himself on Mistress Ashburn's chair, he laid the paper on the table.

"See, here is the rough draught I have made. You will perceive there are thirteen stripes alternating red and white; the canton will be blue with thirteen stars."

For the life of her, Betsy could not keep from contemplating the personality of the American general, then in the height of his mental powers. She saw the paper with the design for a banner

Betsy Ross

laid in ink upon it; she saw his large hand with its pointed finger trace the stripes, and heard his words but dimly. If her god had suddenly fallen, there had as suddenly arisen an admiration for the man. His slow, even voice charmed her. He lifted his head and looked at her to mark how he was being followed, and his calm gray eye held her. She noted every minute detail of Washington, from the few faint pockmarks on his temples to the grains of powder that had fallen from his hair upon his broad shoulders. There was something of care and worry in the suggested lines of his face, but no deep wrinkles, no hint of weakness. The chin was powerful, the lips firm, the cheekbones broad, and his countenance pale though not of an unhealthy hue. She comprehended his meaning, though she could not have repeated his words, and as he looked up at her she replied with a mechanical "Yes, Your Excellency," and let her eye travel from his face to the portrait on the wall. Instantly his look followed hers, and he dropped the subject in hand as he pointed to the painting and said to Mr. Ross:

"Why, here we are, as true as life, Ross, and it is as good of me as any I have yet had!" And Washington, who through all his days was mightily interested in his own portraits, arose and walked to the picture, standing before it in serious contemplation, his hands clasped behind his back.

"Come, come, gentlemen, this is beside the business," he continued abruptly, returning to the

The Flag Committee

table. "We were speaking of the stars. Is there anything about the flag that you can suggest, Mrs. Ross?"

"Your Excellency," said Betsy, "I see your stripes are white at top and bottom. Do you not think red better to begin and end with?"

"Possibly," said Washington musingly.

"And your stars are six-pointed. Would not a five-pointed star be better?"

"It makes little difference," was the answer. "I conceived the six-pointed star easier to form. Is it not so?"

"No, Your Excellency. See!" said Betsy, with animation, and quickly catching up a piece of paper, she folded it rapidly and deftly.

The three men watched her narrowly, each noting the delicate movement of her quick fingers. Not for months had the mind of any one of the three descended to the equal triviality of looking with interest at a pretty woman manipulate a square of paper; but when in something less than thirty seconds she completed it, and, feeling for the scissors hanging at her waist, gave the folded paper one straight cut, the applause of the commander-in-chief and the Congressional committee was genuine, for by the single clip had been formed a perfectly proportioned five-pointed star.

"Bless me!" said Washington in frank wonder, as all laughed easily. "The decision is decidedly in your favor, Mistress Ross. Practical ocular demonstration leaves no room for argument."

Betsy Ross

"Are you quite consistent in that, General?" asked Betsy roguishly.

Morris and her uncle stared at the girl in wonder. Washington turned toward her with an approach to a twinkle in his rather severe eye.

"How so, madam?"

The little woman felt that she had gone a step too far, but it was now beyond her power to retreat with grace. Blushing vividly, she answered:

"Because, Your Excellency—because the British complain that, though they have practical ocular demonstration that you are whipped, yet you will still persist in giving them an argument on the subject."

Washington smiled grimly, for compliment was not to his liking. Turning to Mr. Ross, he said:

"Ross, your niece is a natural diplomatist; more, a person of excellent judgment. We can do no better than leave the flag in her hands to complete, according to her taste, on the lines as laid out."

"I only hope I shall succeed in pleasing you," exclaimed Betsy.

"There can be but little doubt as to that," was the answer. Then he added impressively: "This design of the flag you are requested to make has already been accepted by the Continental Congress in secret session as the standard of the new nation. But Congress must see the completed flag to pronounce it official. Until it is finished the greatest secrecy should be observed. The reasons are obvious."

The Flag Committee

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"To that end, and that you may suffer no unwilling intrusion, I will place Lieutenant Wheatly in command of a detachment here until the flag is finished."

Mrs. Ross courtesied. "Then may I have a week, Your Excellency? There are many things to consider."

"Surely, madam," said the commander-in-chief as he made a move to go. "A week from this day, at this hour—eh, gentlemen? Mr. Morris, I think we have finished."

Mr. Morris accepted the hint, and departed to notify the squad without. Mr. Ross took his niece by the hand and said:

"General, I am happy to say that you have no greater or truer champion than my little friend here."

"I need not be told so," said Washington, drawing his tall figure to its full height. A figure impressive to all men—friends or enemies. "Seriously, Mrs. Ross," he continued, "you are, indeed, to be envied. Other wars and other generals may come and go, but to you will always remain the sole honor of having made the first flag of the United States, a flag which may float for centuries."

The words uttered in the gloom of the little shop in Arch Street were both impressive and prophetic. The impulsive nature of the woman was touched, and Mr. George Ross bowed his dignified head.

"God grant it!" said Betsy, with two great

Betsy Ross

tears hanging on her lashes. "It remains for Your Excellency to make it possible."

Washington made no reply, but holding out his hand, took the little widow's in his mighty grasp, then bowing, turned and left the room with his habitual dignity.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LITTLE BACK PARLOR

THE little back parlor adjoining the shop, and in which was born the present American flag, was in no way a remarkable apartment, possessing only the distinctive features of the period in both architecture and arrangement, though perhaps it owed something of its bright attractiveness and homelike air to the taste of its occupant.

It was a low-ceiled room, almost square. A quaintly carved mantel gave a decided finish to the open fireplace, now so filled with fresh boughs that the firedogs were smothered in green. A large, low window of small diamond panes, the sash swinging inward, opened on the yard, and through it could be seen, above the roofs of the adjacent houses, the belfry tower of Independence Hall, from whose barren flag pole the national colors were soon to fly.

On the seat which ran the length of the casement were placed a few flowering plants, and the light muslin curtains, now drawn back, fluttered gently as the hot summer breeze drew into the interior. A door led to the kitchen beyond, and between door and window an open flight of stairs sprang to

Betsy Ross

the apartments above. Two feet from the floor there was a landing from which the steps led straight into the room, and over this landing a small window was let into the wall and communicated with the kitchen beyond. Over it hung a flintlock musket and a sword without its scabbard—relics of the late John Ross. Opposite the fireplace a door opened into the shop.

The furniture of the apartment was simple. A large combination desk and bookcase, its oval glass doors lined with green silk plaited to a center, stood upon one side of the room, and there was a center table and a number of chairs here and there. The attractiveness of the apartment was made great by the bright rag carpet covering the floor, and yet greater by the late afternoon sun that streamed through the broad window, bringing out the few spots of stained glass therein, and waking into brilliancy the gay colors of the plants and the carpet on which its mellow light fell.

But if the room was pretty, the prettiest object in it was the young widow, who, seated on a low chair, was working at the almost completed flag which now needed but a few more stars in its blue canton and the running of a seam or two. The banner, a large one, rippled in many folds and blendings of its red and white stripes from her lap to the floor over which it spread. On her right, and close by her side, stood a small hair trunk studded with brass nails. Opposite the little widow sat Mrs. Bass, spinning, the low voice of her wheel,

The Little Back Parlor

silenced for generations, filling the room with its sleepy hum. And mingling with the sound was the soft crooning song of Betsy, who, with her small foot upon a cradle, was rocking a newly born infant as she worked.

But for hum and song the room was silent. Anon from the street came the sound of a passing vehicle, and finally the cry of the vegetable peddler. "I declare for't!" said Mrs. Bass, as she forcibly broke the thread and removed the bobbin preparatory to "winding off," "if there ain't that Dutch gardener again! Now I suppose Clarissa's satisfied."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Bass?" said Betsy, stopping her song.

"I mean that since she's begun to get strong again, Clarissa seems to be sot on seein' that Dutchman as he passes, an' is as tetchy as a settin' hen till he gets by; then she seems relieved like."

Betsy smiled at the evident fancy of the older lady, and was about to make some light remark, when the shop bell rang out clearly.

"There! I must go, Mrs. Bass," she exclaimed, crowding the flag into the trunk by her side and closing the lid. "Had you not better run up and see if Mrs.—if Clarissa wants anything?" And she brushed a few loose threads from her lap and went out. Mrs. Bass paused a moment by the sleeping infant, whose little thumb, already in its mouth, bespoke a good disposition, and with a careful step climbed the stairs and disappeared.

Betsy Ross

It was a fateful moment for Clarence Vernon. As a Dutch peddler (and his peculiar talents fitted him for the rôle) he had called his wares for nearly a week without interruption, tramping to and from the suburbs of Philadelphia each day in fair weather and foul. He was becoming confident in his disguise—overconfident, perhaps, but yet was sufficiently circumspect. The guard in front of the shop had made it impossible for him to receive notes from that side of the house, but he soon discovered that the rear was easily accessible through its alley or "back street," and latterly he had from this point seen crumpled bits of paper thrust from between the slats of the blind above, and he knew that, thus far, all was well. He therefore made his route extend through Arch Street and into the back street, that he might give his wife two glimpses of him and yet have one point at which he was sure of receiving his message. Beyond his father, mother, and his wife, he had no dream that his identity was known or guessed at. Nor was he far wrong. He was not known, but he was mildly suspected, and by no less a person than Lemuel Bass.

That astute gentleman had not yet succeeded in recapturing the escaped ex-pirate, and his faith in himself was beginning to waver, though he still, by special permission, absented himself from night duty and marched his beat during the day. Just where his nights were spent nobody seemed to know, save that they were not spent at home, but as regular as clockwork the doughty watchman

The Little Back Parlor

reported to his wife, and, as that lady could now be fairly located at the upholstery shop until nightfall, so might Lemuel Bass be seen plodding toward it every day at about six in the evening. This, too, was the rather unseasonable hour that Clarence had taken for calling his wares in the vicinity of the shop, and time after time had he come face to face with the watchman, who, for all his habit of putting two and two together, had taken no more notice of the spy than to occasionally remark to himself that it was a peculiar time for a Dutchman to hawk vegetables. Over two years before he had known him as Captain Roger Bassett, a man to bow to—one of the *jeunesse dorée* of the city—a man to point out as possessing all the virtues and none of the vices of the gay youth of the period, a model British officer.

The watchman had an uneasy consciousness that he had seen the Dutchman before, but the matter was of no consequence as compared with the errand on which he was bent and which absorbed his mind during his waking hours. He might never have thought of the man again had he not by chance been coming up the street, or properly the alley, in the rear of the shop, in order to make a short cut to see his wife. There, looking in through the broad window, he discovered the Dutchman, and something in the man's manner caused him to halt and watch. It was the moment when Mrs. Ross had been called to the shop and Mrs. Bass was upstairs.

Betsy Ross

Indeed, for a market gardener, Clarence Vernon's actions were hardly consistent with the character. As he looked through the open casement in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of his wife, his eye took in the details of the interior, but it stopped short at the cradle. With instinctive certainty he felt that within it lay his own child, and there took possession of him such a wild desire to see it closely, to take it in his arms, to press it to him, that for the moment, forgetting where he was and what his danger, he pushed wide the casement and would have leaped into the room had it not been for the basket on his back. He was not so foolish as to run all risks. Suspicion had become a second nature to him, wavering only for that one moment, and in order to be assured of his safety he looked about him only to see the watchman, who, on the opposite side of the way, appeared to have halted a moment to adjust the buckle of his shoe. This determined him. He would not attempt the window, but there was the kitchen which might lead into the room, and with a warning cry of "Fresh vegetables" he pushed open the door and entered. Like the little back parlor, the kitchen was deserted, and quickly unslinging his basket from his back, he made for the door beyond. It opened easily and he found himself in the presence of his child. He had not gone halfway across the floor, however, when he heard a door open above him, and with a quick perception he knew that the person who was coming down the stairs had seen him at once, and that he

The Little Back Parlor

would jeopardize all his chances if he attempted flight. He must brave it out. He stopped short and appeared to be looking about him in blank curiosity as Mrs. Bass halted in her descent.

"Bless me! What are you doing here?" said that lady as she recognized the vendor who had haunted the place day after day.

"You want wegetables — nice fresh wegetables?" returned Vernon with a semi-stupid grin that fitted his awkward posture.

"No, I don't. The imperence! Walkin' right into people's houses like that!"

"Vell! somepoddy vas nod in der kitchen, already, und I cooms here!" said the vendor, spreading his hands and shrugging his shoulders with a loutish attempt at excuse, at the same time edging himself toward the cradle. "Dere vos some strawberries to-day, yet—oh, my! vat pretty leetle papy! Und vos dat yours?"

Vernon's policy was either of the highest order or his remark accidentally fortunate, for the last question completely mollified the good-natured dame, who was not only flattered by the words but quite taken by the countenance of the supposed peddler.

"No, young man, that's not mine, but if you have some nice strawberries I'll take some." And Mrs. Bass descended into the room.

"Oh, yah; but I loofs dem leetle fellers!" said Vernon, ignoring the answer and bending over the cradle. "Iss he a gal?"

Betsy Ross

"Is *he* a girl? Yes, *it's* a girl!" said the lady, with a laugh, as she moved to Vernon's side and looked down at the sleeping infant.

"Vell, now, dot's funny!"

"Funny!" Her smile gave way to half-indignant protest. "Well, I don't see anything funny about it!"

"Vell, vy, I have got one youst *ox*-actly like dot!"

"Oh, not exactly!" said Mrs. Bass with some complacency as she folded her arms and pitied such ignorance.

"Aye, yah! der nose, der mout, der ears—eff-eryting! It vos *on*-posseeble dot you tole vich vos de odder."

At the dialect, the earnestness, and uncouth tenderness of the man Mrs. Bass shook her stout sides and laughed aloud.

"Men are such stupid. I declare for't, they can't tell one baby from another," she remarked, as much to herself as to the peddler.

"Ach, you tinks so? To-morrow, ven it goes deventy minoots pehind four o'glock, my papy iss a week old, already."

The good lady's arms fell to her sides and her eyes widened in astonishment.

"Bless my soul! Dear me! A week at twenty minutes past four to-morrow! Why, that's baby's age to a minute! Did any one ever!"

"Yah—didn't I tole you? Und I loofs dem so—I loofs dem so! Dem pretty leetle fellers vos

The Little Back Parlor

like some great pig flowers mit der sun a-shinin' on dem! Oh, dey so pretty! You see my face is gleam; may I kiss dot lëetle papy? Please, mississ." And the peddler looked up beseechingly. The gesture, the tone, the simple appeal was pathetic. The tears sprang to Mrs. Bass's eyes. She turned away her head to conceal her emotion.

"Good land! yes. Kiss her if ye want to. I guess ye won't pizen it!"

"You vos a goot voman, Mrs. Fish," said the man as he placed his lips on the face of his child.

"My name is Bass, young man," said the lady, tartly. "Who told ye it was Fish?"

"Oh, dot vos so!" said Vernon, looking up with a bright smile. "Oh, yah-ha-ha—! But bass vos fish, don't it? I vos tole yer name py somepoddy—I forget now. I vos no more to stay here. Peesness is for me nix goot here py Phil-my-delf-ee. I go py Trenton to-night."

"Well, now! That's too bad!" said the lady, wondering how the peddler's absence would affect the whim of her patient upstairs. But whatever she might have intended saying on the subject (and it is probable that she would have said a great deal) was frustrated by the sudden entrance of Lemuel Bass.

At the sight of him Vernon averted his face and began backing from the room, still talking volubly in the dialect he had adopted; but the very obvious attempt at concealing his identity fanned the watchman's latent suspicion into activity, for he instant-

Betsy Ross

ly recognized that here was a man not "runnin' true."

The watchman's temper had not been softened by his disappointment of the week, and his promotion, which had been promised him conditionally, seemed as far from him as ever. He was in no mood to temporize with a simple Dutchman. Even if he made a mistake no harm could come of it. His curiosity was aroused, and therefore he interposed his burly form between Vernon and the door.

"Well, Friend Hans, ain't ye stepping up a peg to leave yer truck in the kitchen an' go callin' on ladies in the parlor. Wot's yer name?"

"Who vos you?" asked Vernon, stopping and looking up, as though questioning the right of the watchman to challenge him.

"Never ye mind about me!" returned Bass as his eye played over the supposed peddler. "Ye can answer me or ye can trot down to the squire's with me."

Vernon recognized that he was in a tight place, but his nerve did not leave him. There had been nothing said to lead him to think his identity had been suspected. His powers at acting had been tested more than once and he felt little doubt that he could get out of the dilemma. Therefore he changed his aggressiveness to good nature, and with a broad laugh said:

"Oh, my, but you vos dot watch feller! Oh, yah! I vos Carl Schuffler py Chermantown. I go py Trenton to-night already."

The Little Back Parlor

The watchman made no answer, but peered into Vernon's face for fully a minute as he tried to place the man, while with Dutch persistency that gentleman glared as fixedly at the watchman. It was a comical tableau, suggestive of the two Dromios save in dress and appearance, but in a twinkling the humor fled from it; it became well-nigh tragic, and the tragic atmosphere seemed to be accentuated by a sudden quenching of the sunlight and an ominous though distant rumble of thunder which shook the house like the tones of a sub-bass.

For as Bass scrutinized the grinning face of the man before him a great light broke on him. The widening of the watchman's eyes and the gradual yet complete growth of wonder on his countenance warned Vernon that his secret had been probed. For a time the watchman said not a word. He had put two and two together and the sum total was four. To him the discovery was a terrific thing, and for the moment he was overcome by it and its probable results to his own fortunes. He struggled to conceal his triumph but to little purpose, as he well knew when he marked the smiling visage of his intended captive turn hard and lose its Dutch simplicity. Knowing full well that that which was to be done was to be done quickly, Bass stepped back, his eye still fixed on his victim, and putting his hand behind him, locked the kitchen door. That mode of egress being secured, he turned to his wife, who was bending over the infant.

Betsy Ross

"Sarah, step out an' ask the lieutenant to bring in a couple of men. Move quick!"

Mrs. Bass looked frightened, for her husband's face bore a strange appearance and his voice had an official ring about it that made it impressive to her. Even the gardener had changed. His clothes no longer suited him. His tall figure was erect and his erstwhile innocent eyes looked like an angry cat's. Mrs. Bass felt as though she had been fondling a snake, and with the exclamation, "Massy on us!" the good woman hurried through the shop door. As she disappeared Vernon dropped all pretense and said:

"Well, and what are you going to do, Mr. Bass?"

"A fine thing for Captain Roger Bassett to ask o' me!" returned the watchman, rubbing his fat chin. "But ye can feel safe that ye will be arrested for being a British officer in disguise an' out o' place. Ye may figger out the end. I don't want'er."

The young man had advanced from dilemma to desperation and made the step in a hurry. Even as the watchman spoke, he was as rapidly putting his chances into shape. To bound up the stairs to his wife would avail him nothing, and to be taken as a spy in her presence would kill her, past doubt. So he reasoned. The kitchen door was locked, and to flee through the shop meant to drop into the arms of the guard without. But there was the window. He dared not look toward it lest a hint of his desperate intention should be conveyed to the

The Little Back Parlor

watchman. He knew the casement was open; fortunately he had pushed it in before entering the house, and, as though it was a good augury for his success, a flash of lightning dispersed for an instant the fast gathering gloom and showed that the window as well as the street beyond was clear.

The crash that followed the bolt was demoralizing for the moment to the strongest nerves. It was a signal for Vernon, however, for with a quick gathering of his forces he advanced one step toward the waiting and overconfident watchman, and with his clinched fist—having no weapon—struck him full in the face with all his power; then turning, he leaped for the window and out just as the door from the shop opened to Lieutenant Wheatly, who took in the situation at a glance.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FLIGHT

As Vernon cleared the window his ear caught both the sound of the fall of the watchman and the shout of the officer, and he was perfectly aware that the only start he had of his pursuers was the time it would take to unlock the kitchen door and get into the street; not such an easy matter, as it happened, for the ponderous form of the half-stunned watchman lay athwart the door, which opened inward.

The great drops that heralded the coming shower splashed on the stones, and doubtless, to the minds of the many who saw him, accounted for the mad haste of the running Dutchman. He was young, athletic, and in perfect health, and like a deer he fled, turning into Front Street just as his pursuers got clear of the house. Down Front Street he went at a breakneck pace until opposite the Bank Hill Meetinghouse; then he doubled behind it and there stopped for sorely needed breath.

Whither was he fleeing? he suddenly asked himself, and the pertinency of the question staggered him. He tried the door he saw in the end of the building, but it was fastened. To return to his miserable lodging was but to hide while the alarm and

The Flight

his description spread. He would surely be taken on the morrow. To seek his own home would be to ruin his parents, even, indeed, if his mother would take the risk of giving him shelter. He thought—and the thought was born of his desperation—of going to the house of Griscom, hard by, and throwing himself on the mercy of the Quaker on the plea of being his son-in-law, but the idea was both repugnant and useless, for he reasoned, and logically enough, that the man who would disown his own daughter would have scant charity for the hunted refugee who had married her. He even thought of stealing a skiff and floating down the Delaware; but the idea was immediately dismissed as he considered the small chances of getting a boat unobserved, and the final impossibility of eluding the river patrol above or below the city.

At present he was at liberty, but not safe. He was a bird in a large cage, but he knew that by the morrow the walls of his cage would narrow and he would be caught. The way his past life danced before him showed him how slight was his hold on the future. The thing that stood out—the figure he most regretted—was his wife and the fact of his being a father. His own probable disgraceful death—that of a spy—troubled him not at all. If anything, he looked upon it as a just desert. He had no business to be in his own country as its avowed enemy. He was entirely fair with himself. He recognized that he was that detestable character—a renegade. He saw that the circumstances which had led him to

Betsy Ross

his present position were due to a fault entirely his own, however much he now regretted it—a fault committed nearly upon the spot on which he was then standing, and less than four years before. The very tree under which the sexton had been stricken down stretched its boughs beyond the end of the meetinghouse, and its waving limbs and the rustling of its leaves suggested shelter of some sort. It was now raining in torrents.

The hunt had either gone by unknown to him or had taken a wrong turn, the pursuers probably thinking that the fugitive had made for the open country, for as he carefully looked around the corner of the building there was not a soul in sight, the rain having driven passers-by from the street. Seeing that the coast was clear, Vernon left the rear of the meetinghouse, where he had been exposed to the full force of the storm, and ran to the oak. From its seat he sprang into the lower branches of the tree, then made his way upward to where the thick foliage somewhat protected him from the downpour and screened him completely from human eyes. He cudgeled his brain that it might show him a possible opening from his desperate situation. He could not remain where he was for an indefinite time. The peculiar peril of his position was further driven home to him—if that had been possible—by the quick clatter of a troop of cavalrymen as they galloped through the rain and went down the hill with the evident intention of patrolling the city's water front, and their unwonted activity at

The Flight

such an hour showed him that the presence of Captain Bassett of the British forces was probably already known at headquarters, and that headquarters was stirred by the knowledge. The young man realized the policy being pursued. Every mode of egress was to be closed to him that his hunting down might be the more certain. It is probable that his safety for the moment lay in the fact that his pursuers did not dream he would remain so near the scene of his capture and escape. The hurrying cavalry gave him an idea, and as though to encourage it, shortly after they had passed he saw the Quaker, Griscom, wrapped in a long coat, his legs protected by sherryvallies or spatterdashes, emerge from his grounds and go down the hill in the rear of the soldiers, who had soon disappeared. His opportunity seemed to be at hand, and glad he was to avail himself of it, for the face of the heavens had now become appalling.

The shower that was slackening had evidently been but a forerunner of the real convulsion of Nature which was threatening, for as Vernon looked from his perch and toward the west he was astounded at the appearance of the sky. Up from the horizon was rising a pall of inky blackness in contrast with which the present weeping clouds were bright. That the menace meant something more serious than a mere re-enforcement of the storm then passing, the youth was certain. There was no form to the approaching clouds; no light

Betsy Ross

outriders whirling their flowing banners; no rolling cavalry of vaporous masses in the van of the coming dread. The breeze that had been blowing fell to a dead calm. It was all magnificent and horrible, and even under the conditions besetting him the fugitive quailed at the sinister look of the heavens. Shelter, temporary at least, had become necessary.

With the disappearance of Samuel Griscom, Vernon made up his mind. Probably no point in the city was so safe from search as the portion in which he then was, and his best chance was to remain in it. So he reasoned; and, though he had considered it useless to appeal to the humanity or the charity of the Quaker, it might be possible to touch the heart of the Quaker's wife. A father could turn his daughter out of doors, but he does not necessarily turn her from her mother's heart. Vernon knew the Tory proclivities of the lady, and between her affection for her daughter and her own politics she might consent to assist him. Therefore he divested himself of his soaking blouse, left it and his Dutch cap hanging on an upper branch of the oak, and descending the tree, walked openly though rapidly to the gate in the brick wall. Entering, he stepped up the immaculate marble steps to the equally immaculate front door, and rapped loudly with the polished brass knocker.

He was playing a desperate game, and it was seemingly his last throw. Most decidedly he thought he had cast the dice and lost when he saw

The Flight

the door open and he found himself face to face with Mr. Lemuel Bass.

The watchman had a bandage about his head, covering one eye, which, perhaps, caused him to fail at once to recognize his man. The flaring candle he carried in his hand might have helped to render Vernon's features uncertain, but that was only for an instant. Both men were equally taken aback, but Vernon was the first to absorb the situation in full. He was about to turn when the force of the discovery dawned upon the watchman. Uttering a cry, Bass dropped the candle to the floor and made a dash at the spy almost within his reach. But he was both too slow and too clumsy. The young man leaped to one side, put out a leg and tripped him, and as the portly officer shot headlong down the shallow steps, his intended victim turned and fled again.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

As Betsy looked out of her shop window she, too, noticed the unusual aspect of the sky. The previous rain had driven from the streets all pedestrians, and the hour was near the usual one for closing. She would anticipate the time and devote it to the flag which had been promised for the following afternoon. There were yet a few hours' work upon it, for in those days the sewing machine was not known, and a long seam meant time and patience. There had been much to upset the little widow and retard her work during the day. Many people, attracted by the soldiers without, sought the shop from curiosity, under the cloak of patronage, and the last stirring incident in the shape of a disguised criminal discovered in and escaping from the house, was the final reason that determined her to close the shop earlier than usual that she might make up for lost time. She had heard no particulars anent the man who had fled. Mrs. Bass, now above with the infant and its mother, could tell her nothing definite, and had interlarded and confused her narrative with so many homely exclamations that to Betsy the affair was one of considerable complication. Lem-

The Breaking of the Storm

uel Bass had done some forcible cursing, had refused to commit himself, and had gone out after the soldiers, who immediately went in pursuit of the fugitive. Betsy had seen Lieutenant Wheatly hurry through the shop in answer to the call from Mrs. Bass, but from that time he had been absent, and therefore she was in ignorance as to the identity of the escaped man as well as the cause of his pursuit.

The brave little woman blew out the candle in the window, and, locking the door, turned toward the now gloomy interior and hastened to her parlor, glad enough to get back to its cheerful precincts and be blind to the threat of the approaching tempest.

As she entered the room the sight of a tall and strange female figure startled her, for the light of the single candle hardly cleared the darkness. There was little delay in her visitor proclaiming herself, however, for as she took off her wet pelisse and threw back her gauzy calash, Betsy saw the hard features of her erstwhile customer Mrs. Vernon.

Mrs. Ross was astonished. The uninvited and unexpected presence of this woman, together with her forbidding expression of countenance, troubled the little widow, who already had trouble enough. The sight of the aristocrat seemed a portent of future difficulties, but Betsy had no time to wonder at her own aversion toward her visitor before that visitor spoke.

"Oh! Mrs. Ross! I have to beg your pardon for intruding on you thus, but it became necessary, as

Betsy Ross

I did not care to be seen entering your shop at this hour. I came in the back way."

"You honor me, madam," said Betsy, with true hospitality. "Will you not be seated?"

Mrs. Vernon sank into a chair with some little doubt as to the propriety of accepting even so small a favor.

"I really came to see your sister on a matter—she is stopping with you, I am informed."

"May I ask your informant?"

"Certainly—Captain Roger Bassett."

"Oh! Her husband!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Vernon, with a show of unmistakable surprise. "And it is my turn to inquire who your informant may be?"

"Why, my sister, of course." And Betsy opened her eyes in wonder that the information was needed.

Mrs. Vernon pursed her lips. "Oh, yes. It is quite a delicate matter, but I fear the whole business is irregular."

"Madam!" said Betsy, with slight asperity. "Perhaps it would not be amiss were you to tell me in what manner you are connected with this affair."

Mrs. Vernon did not like the tone, neither did she like the idea of being questioned by this mere shopkeeper. Her sense of superiority was a trifle outraged, but as she looked into the clear eyes of the girl and detected nothing but implied aggressiveness in the place of humility, she answered, "My

The Breaking of the Storm

interest is that of an old and confidential friend of the family."

"And I am to understand that you are acting by their request?"

Mrs. Vernon shifted uneasily, but answered, "By their request."

"You have known Captain Bassett long?"

"From birth, and his parents before him."

"Then you know his real name?"

"Yes; do you?"

"No."

Mrs. Vernon drew a long breath of relief. She had thought that perhaps she was being trapped. "I do not think it either necessary or expedient to mention it now," said that lady, drawing her skirts about her and affecting a businesslike air. "I will, however, say that his family is of the best; refined, wealthy, and prominent. This alliance—it were worse than silly to dignify it by calling it marriage—is absolutely repugnant to them. They will not consider it a moment."

"Oh! they will not?" said Betsy, with a peculiar intonation.

"No; nor can they be blamed. To begin with, they do not think your sister the equal of their son."

"Oh! they do not?" returned the little woman, stiffening and looking slightly dangerous. "But, madam, if they love each other?"

"Oh! Mrs. Ross, you are still of the sentimental age," said Mrs. Vernon, with a faint but

Betsy Ross

patronizing smile, as she unclasped her reticule. "You are certainly old enough—I am, and you can not be far behind me—I say you certainly are old enough to recognize the sentimental twaddle about love. Love in a cottage becomes endurable only when both are cottagers by birth and taste. What is more to the point, his parents will disown and disinherit their son if he persists."

"Madam, that is no threat. I am quite sure they married for love. My sister cared neither for his money nor position."

"Married! My dear Mrs. Ross," returned Mrs. Vernon, "I tell you there was no marriage!"

"And I tell you, my dear Mrs. Vernon, that there *was* a marriage!"

"Search the records in the town hall," said the elder lady triumphantly. "You will not find it, and those Quaker laws are very strict."

"Madam, you overleap yourself," was the equally triumphant return. "The omission to report might entail a fine, but it would not invalidate the marriage."

Mrs. Ross's visitor flounced angrily. This woman knows too much, was her self-comment, but outwardly she remarked: "It will be necessary to prove this marriage, as you term it, for Judge Vernon is about to convene court, and it will be annulled as irregular."

Betsy came to her feet. "Mrs. Vernon, are you attempting to play with me? I happen to know that your husband, though at heart as great a rebel as am

The Breaking of the Storm

I, has no office at present. How, then, can he hold court?"

The Tory lady turned pale at the reference to her husband's well-known Whigism, and her anger became apparent as she saw her defeat and the unimpregnable position of the simple woman whom she had expected to easily ride over, if, indeed, she did not prove an ally. She had told a lie from which it was difficult to retreat, but the devil was yet her mentor. "I mean, of course, that my husband will plead. He is still a lawyer," she returned lamely, diving into her reticule as much to hide her confusion as to extract the paper she brought forth. "But this is aside from the subject," she continued. "We will finish matters at once. I am authorized to say that if your sister will sign this paper, she will have, through my husband, an annuity of two hundred pounds a year—an annuity for life."

"What is the nature of this paper?" asked Betsy, now up in arms as she scented the mission of her visitor. "And why do not the family names appear instead of your husband's alone?"

"The paper is but an expression of willingness that the marriage should be annulled—and as for the names of the family, they do not wish to be known in the matter."

"I do not wonder! And so you came here to buy my sister! Does Captain Bassett know of this? Have you heard from him?"

"Heard from him! Why, I have talked with him here in Philadelphia but a few days since!"

Betsy Ross

And Mrs. Vernon looked astonished that the fact had not been patent.

Betsy's heart sank. Her original suspicion revived. "It is as I feared!" she cried. "Then she has been duped, tricked, ruined! The man is a villain!"

"Oh, my dear Mrs.——"

"Madam," said the outraged woman, flashing a look of intense scorn and anger on her visitor as she interrupted her, "do you wish an answer?"

"I will see your sister," said Mrs. Vernon, quailing before Betsy's face and replacing the paper in her reticule.

"You will *not* see my sister, Mrs. Vernon. I can speak for her. She will not sign away her honor!"

"Oh, very well!" returned the discomfited woman, rising, and mighty willing to retreat while she could do so with decent grace. "Whatever may happen, then, the result is upon your head—the blame must rest with you. You will yet sue for mercy at my hands. It is always so when the low try to rise above their true position!"

"Madam, I am above your innuendoes. I think your errand is done!"

And Betsy, with admirable self-control, stepped toward the candle that she might light her adversary from the room. She stopped short, however, and listened, her face growing white, while Mrs. Vernon, who had sidled toward the door, halted

The Breaking of the Storm

with an exclamation, and the two women turned and stared at each other.

And they were justified, for in the distance, and rapidly coming nearer, was a mingling of noises that neither lady had ever heard before; a wailing roar rising to a shriek, accompanied by snapping branches, slamming blinds, and the crashing of glass. Mixed with it, too, was the shouting of men and the report of a firearm, and before either lady could realize that it was the approach of the tornado which heralded the great storm of 1777, there came a flash of lightning that was dazzling. The thunder-clap following was not immediate, but it arrived with stunning effect, and the room seemed filled with a whirling fog of mist as the force of the wind dashed in the unfastened casement. In an instant the candle was extinguished, and in the darkness of the room through the window could be faintly distinguished objects in the street beyond.

Pandemonium reigned within and without. The wind, compressed between the houses, seemed to be a visible mass, roaring, snarling, and picking up and urging forward everything not fastened to the earth. Even through her thickened heartbeats Betsy noticed the procession of inanimate objects that hurtled down the way—boxes and barrels, the full ones rolling, those light and empty bounding along in mad glee; linen stripped from their lines, branches of great trees, flowerpots, loose boards from suddenly demolished fences, portions of shutters, and a mass of matter that flew by in a whirl of mist, for the dust,

Betsy Ross

having been laid by the previous shower, made vision comparatively clear. Even before her eyes came down a mass of bricks that rattled into the street, and Betsy knew that her own chimney had gone.

She had sprung to the window and attempted to close it, but the pressure of the air was too great for her strength, and she was about calling for assistance when, to her amazement, she noticed the figure of a man on his hands and knees crawling around the corner of the kitchen wing, closely hugging the wall. As he came into comparative shelter he sprang to his feet and ran into the kitchen just as she fastened the window latch. Hardly had she turned away when she heard the door from the kitchen dashed open and the man entered, closing and locking it behind him. Before he spoke he ran to the window and drew its curtains, then turning, through his distressed panting he blurted out:

“Save me—hide me—I have been recognized! If I am caught—God keep my——”

His final words were lost in the flash and crash that came together.

As suddenly as the tornado had struck the city, so suddenly it passed, and even as the thunder rolled in the distance the roar of the wind subsided and the rain began to fall in a heavy deluge. Half-stunned by the shock, Betsy stood a moment striving to realize what had happened, and as the noise fell and she knew the worst was over, the little

The Breaking of the Storm

woman regained her equilibrium and turned upon the newcomer.

“Who are you, sir?”

“I am a British officer,” he said, hoarsely and breathlessly.

As he spoke, Betsy looked into his face. “You are the gardener—the peddler. Why, then, you are a spy!”

The little widow backed away from him. Mrs. Vernon gave a suppressed scream and held out her hands. With her speech thickened by emotion she cried:

“In God’s name, Mrs. Ross, save him!”

“No, I shall not!” returned Betsy, drawing herself up. “I will not allow it to be said that Betsy Ross harbored a spy. Hark! There are his pursuers!” she concluded, as a loud knocking at both door and window showed that Vernon’s refuge had been discovered. Mrs. Vernon threw one glance about the room and fell on her knees.

“See, I humble myself before you, Mrs. Ross! Save him, I implore you! He is my son!”

“Your son!” said Betsy, looking hard at him through the dusk. “Your son! I thought him dead! But he is none the less a traitor for all he is your son! I shall——”

“Nay!” interrupted the man, “not for my mother, then, nor for me—but for your sister! I am your sister’s husband!—I am Captain Bassett!”

For a moment Betsy played the woman purely. “My sister’s husband! Her son!” she gasped,

Betsy Ross

looking wildly about her, her confusion being aided by the continuous banging at the door, an attack that must soon have broken it down. "Oh, my poor girl! What can I do? What can I do?" And she looked piteously at the upper room, as though calling on Clarissa for help in her extremity.

As though her glance above was a hint to him, Vernon turned and bounded up the steps, and his evident intention brought the little widow back to a state of coherence of mind and speech.

"No—no!" she cried. "Not there! It would kill her if she knew! There is no place of concealment above!" And she sprang to the window, peeping through the curtains. "Soldiers! Good God! Here, sir; quick! Lie down at the foot of this chair!"

Perfectly tractable, Vernon turned and obeyed her in absolute confidence, while Betsy hurriedly took the flag from the trunk and spread it carelessly over his recumbent figure. As she made sure the man was concealed, she drew herself up, two bright spots burning on her cheeks, and notwithstanding the noise at the door, which was at each moment increasing, she walked to Mrs. Vernon.

"Madam, that which I am about to do is not for your sake, nor yet for your son's, but for my sister whom you came prepared to dishonor. Do as I tell you, and I may yet save my sister's husband. Unlock the shop door and throw it wide open, then come back here. Calm yourself, madam, else you ruin all!"

The Breaking of the Storm

She spoke quickly and forcibly, then turning, entered the kitchen, and taking a brand from the fireplace, lighted a candle ere she unfastened the outer door, which was already well-nigh off its hinges.

CHAPTER XXVII

A WOMAN'S WIT

WITH well-feigned astonishment and anger Mrs. Ross met the gaze of Lieutenant Wheatly and the three men with him; sorry specimens of the military service, soaked, buffeted by the storm, and half-exhausted. A thin line of blood ran down the officer's forehead, and he breathed like one who had been running a race.

"What is the meaning of this?" she said as with wide-open eyes she held up the light and looked at the bedraggled quartette.

Wheatly made an attempt to bow politely as he doffed his limp and tattered hat and gazed at the woman, beautiful in her suppressed excitement. He spoke in gasps.

"A man—the British officer who escaped—had been rediscovered. My men and I were pursuing—I shot at him and he took refuge here—locking the door behind him."

"Are you quite sure?" said Betsy, looking about the kitchen, as though she feared some one would leap at her.

"Positively. And we would have caught him had it not been for the terrible wind. I was struck

A Woman's Wit

by some flying object as I fired at him. We saw our man creep around the house. He is here."

Betsy gave a well-defined shudder and backed out of the kitchen.

"You can search, sir," she answered, "but I think it impossible. I have a friend here. There is a sick lady upstairs. I—I am willing to swear that I saw no one run through the shop."

Wheatly advanced into the parlor and turned to a soldier. "Corporal, set one to search the kitchen, the other the shop. Stand guard by the door yourself." And as the man saluted, the officer drew his sword and turned to the stairs, only to find the way blocked by Betsy, who, candle still in hand, stood facing him from the lower step.

"Nay, Lieutenant Wheatly. There is some one very ill upon the floor above," she said calmly. "A sudden shock would prove fatal. Will you accept my word of honor that no man has passed up these stairs within the last ten minutes? This lady will verify me."

Mrs. Vernon's face was like dirty chalk, the result possibly of the storm and the violent intrusion of the soldiers. So thought the officer. He gazed at her curiously as she gasped out:

"That is absolutely correct, sir."

Wheatly turned away from her; the associations connected with her face shocked him, and for a brief second the years fled backward. He had known her only by sight, but it was more than distasteful for him to question the woman whose son

Betsy Ross

he had killed, even though the act had been done in self-defense. He faced the little widow.

"Mrs. Ross, you are aware of the position in which I place myself by taking your word. And you will swear that no man, to your knowledge, has entered this room or the kitchen just before me or my men?"

Betsy's nerve began to fail. Her heart fluttered, but she would probably have lied in the letter as she had already done in the spirit had it not been for Mrs. Vernon, who, hearing the officer's question, gasped and staggered into a chair. To her, her son was already lost.

"Look to the lady, Lieutenant Wheatly!" cried Betsy as she brushed past him without answering his question and just as a soldier re-entered from the shop. "Mrs. Vernon is about to faint!"

With the gallantry of his kind, the officer leaped to Mrs. Vernon's side as she tottered in her seat. "Madam, are you ill?" he asked, for the moment diverted from his mission.

Mrs. Vernon certainly looked as though she was about to die. "The noise—the confusion—the beating in of the door—" she murmured, while Betsy wondered at the weakness of the woman, her own heart doubtful of what would come next.

And the nervous tension of all was brought high by the now terrific downpour which filled the world with a roar like that of a heavy cataract.

"Take this woman to the next room," fairly shouted the officer to the man who had entered.

A Woman's Wit

The soldier raised his hand in salute and shouted in return :

"There is no one in the shop, sir, but I have to report that I found the front door wide open."

"And I locked it," cried Betsy, elated at the success of her strategy. "If the fugitive fastened one entrance and the other is found open, does it not look as though he had escaped through the house?"

Mrs. Vernon staggered to her feet and the soldier conducted her from the room, shutting out some of the tumult as he closed the door behind him.

"And where were you, Mrs. Ross?" asked the lieutenant without meeting her eye.

"Where?" asked the brave girl, flanking the direct question, speaking without hesitation and giving no sign of the strain under which she labored. "I will swear, Lieutenant Wheatly, that no man has passed through this room or up those stairs."

The officer bowed and strode across the room in perplexity. He passed within a step of the flag, which lay heaped on the floor, and there paused. Looking at it with some astonishment, he said :

"May I inquire what this is?" he asked as he pointed to the mass of tumbled colors.

The supreme moment of Betsy's life appeared to be at hand. Not until then did she realize that her country's flag was concealing her country's enemy—a renegade—a traitor—a spy; and that her own hands had cast its folds over him. To be discovered now would be absolute ruin to her sister, her sister's husband, and herself. Even if life was

Betsy Ross

spared to her she would be irretrievably disgraced. And yet this heroic woman drew herself up, and though all the blood in her fair body seemed gathering about her heart, she answered:

"Lieutenant Wheatly, you have penetrated the secret that General Washington set you here to guard. That is the new flag of the new nation, sir, which has been adopted by Congress. I have been honored in making the first official flag of my country."

The officer gazed mournfully at his old love, then sinking to one knee, he picked up a corner of the bunting and pressed it reverently to his lips. As he bent forward a drop of blood from his wounded forehead fell on the bunting. Betsy saw it and it showed her the possibility of drawing the officer from his dangerous position.

"Lieutenant Wheatly is hurt!" she exclaimed. "See! You have bled on the flag! May I not——"

"Have I?" he interrupted. "Well, my hurt is slight enough. As for the blood—it is honest! May its honesty atone for the sin these colors may cover—now—and forever." He hesitated a moment while the woman looked at him in terror of his next move, but raising his head he continued: "I will take your word, Mrs. Ross. My men shall not disturb you. Undoubtedly the spy ran through the house." And with grave dignity Lieutenant Wheatly stepped to the door. Opening it, he said: "Corporal, post your men at front and rear and let no

A Woman's Wit

one leave this house without my permission. If a man attempts to escape, fire on him without hesitation."

With her hand on her heart Betsy listened to this order, which directly contradicted the spirit of his words to her, and an emotion of mingled dread and delight passed through her bosom as she heard him.

Though her loyal and gentle soul had enough upon it to engross her whole being, it was simply impossible for her to be regardless of the now terrific storm. The brightening of the sky after the tornado had been but momentary, and now the roar and downpour were appalling. The drama of the day and the climax of the tempest met at that moment, for hardly had Wheatly issued his order when there came such a glare of light, followed by an awe-inspiring crash, that Betsy placed her hands before her eyes and with a frightened cry sank into a chair. The soldiers staggered against the wall, thoroughly shaken by the terrific explosion, and the officer, white and trembling from the shock, returned to the parlor. The man under the flag lay as though dead.

For a time no one spoke, but as the moments passed so the force of the storm lessened, and presently the thunder became like the distant rumbling of heavy artillery, though like the lightning, now voiceless, grew in frequency until it became incessant. With a tottering step, which she strove to make firm, Betsy went into the kitchen and relighted the candle at the fire. She hurriedly returned to the

Betsy Ross

parlor, not for a moment daring to urge the officer to leave it, and not daring to go to her sister while he remained in the house. If she could only get the man, then under the flag, upstairs to his wife, she might have time to think, but so long as the lieutenant remained in the room that was impossible.

And in the room he seemed determined to remain. He stood by the now half-open window looking out at the brilliant coils of light that rolled behind the clouds like writhing serpents. His sword was drawn ready for emergency and his hand was upon the open casement, which he closed to protect his eyes from the glare of the intermitting flashes just as Betsy re-entered the room. Notwithstanding his disheveled appearance, to the eye of the woman, who had feared he might lift the folds of the flag while she was absent, he was a handsome statue—at once a menace and a ministering angel—a threat and a protection. As she came in with the candle he followed her with his dark eyes.

"I much regret my unceremonious intrusion, Mrs. Ross. Duty is my only excuse. I shall withdraw in a moment," he said, with a graceful bow.

"We need no excuse for doing what we sincerely believe to be our duty, Lieutenant Wheatly," was the cold answer, though the girl's heart glowed; her words, firmly uttered, were a comfort to herself.

"Believe to be! Just as surely as I live I saw that man enter your door and close it behind him."

"Why did you not say this before?"

A Woman's Wit

The officer looked squarely at her. "Because I did not think it advisable."

Betsy turned her head. "Then you think him here!"

"I did not say so. The door was open beyond, you know."

"But your tone implies it, and yet I told you no one had passed through this room while I was in it."

The officer came a step toward her and spoke low. "Yes; and it was because you told me so that I have kept my men from this room. I feared they might discover him."

"You feared?"

"Mrs. Ross," he said, with increasing impressiveness, "is it possible you do not know the penalty for harboring a spy?"

Through the woman's heart there surged a wave of extreme happiness, and yet she faced her lover with a look of injured innocence.

"Upon my word, Lieutenant Wheatly, you are complimentary!"

"No, no, Mrs. Ross," said the man appealingly. "Do not misinterpret me. My anxiety was for you."

"You are kind, sir. But it is evident you doubt. There is no excuse for one who shirks his duty, Lieutenant Wheatly. More than that, there is no excuse needed for those who perform it. I would not have you consider me in this matter. Do your duty, sir. You may search this house."

Betsy Ross

The officer recoiled a pace. The look that met his was far from showing either her wish or her emotion. She wore her mask bravely. Always before her was the fact that he had denied her.

"No!" he answered. "My duty is sufficiently performed by placing a guard about this building to make the fellow's escape impossible. I could not contemplate, even remotely, the possibility of causing trouble or suffering to you."

"Oh, you could not!" returned the young woman with a flash of her eyes. "And is this a sudden solicitude?"

"No!" said the officer with vehemence. "As Heaven is my judge, no! It has never known a moment's abatement since I knew you."

"A whole week!"

"Do not mock me," broke in the young man, passionately holding out both hands. "I will no longer make a pretense of deception to you. Let the mask be laid aside between us. You know who I am!"

"It is less important to know *who* than *what* one may be, Lieutenant Wheatly."

"Why will you still call me by that name?"

"Because you have earned the right to wear it. Because I do not choose to know you by another. I am not cruel. I—I mean to be but frank—and just."

"Ah, but if you knew! Let me explain—let me make a free confession. I beg you to hear me."

"Three years and more, sir! Three years! It

A Woman's Wit

is certainly an interval in which such confession might have come. Is the cause, then, whatever it may be, but just removed?"

The man looked at her stupidly for a moment, then broke out piteously, though his words rose rapidly to passion.

"Alas, no! But you are the one who should be told. You have a right to know it. It will relieve me of a terrible burden that for three years has cut me to the soul. I dared confide it to no one—not even my good aunt whom I have not had the heart to go to; but I *must* be rid of it! Share it with me for the sake of old days. Oh, my love, my love!"

"Sir!" There were great tears in the girl's eyes, but she stood like an arrow.

"Yes—whom I have never ceased to love with my whole heart! Whom I can trust! Whom I know will have some little sympathy for me!"

"Nay, nay, sir," said Betsy, becoming terrified as she pictured the detailed horrors of what she had feared. "I will not listen—you *shall* not tell me, sir!"

"But I *shall*!" cried Ashburn, advancing and taking her by the wrists. His touch was like magic. She turned her head away, but did not repel him. She could only struggle mentally. His words were like a drug to her as he said:

"Loving me, as I am certain you once did, you do not feel the indifference you assume."

For all the influence he possessed, for all the

Betsy Ross

pleading brown eyes and passionate voice, Betsy felt that if he once confessed to the murder of Ketch (for it had become a conviction that this was his reason for concealing his identity) she must forever hate him, and she struggled first for self-command. She summoned all her resources, and as he paused she said quietly but with undoubted firmness:

"Sir, take your hands from me, if you please." He promptly dropped her soft wrists and started to speak, but she anticipated him as she swept to one side and pointed to the door.

"Lieutenant Wheatly, I demand—nay, I *command* that you leave this room instantly. I positively refuse to hear you. I decline to be the repository of your secret. You—you are interfering with me and your own duty—disobeying the general's orders. I *command* you to go—instantly."

Ashburn appeared dumfounded. It was as though support had been taken from him as he was about to be drawn from deep waters. He advanced—halted—advanced again, and stammered:

"Is—is there, then, left no—no spark of——"

"You have no right to question me," she interrupted, afraid to risk another attack from him, afraid to listen to his voice. "If you persist I shall report you to General Washington."

"And is this final?"

"Final!"

It was a terrible effort. She turned away her head as she uttered the word and opened the shop

A Woman's Wit

door. He looked at her helplessly, then passed his hands over his eyes. "God help me! Her love is dead!" And forcing an erect bearing, he marched out of the room.

He might have suffered, but his suffering was as nothing to that of the brave woman he had left, a sight of which suffering would have sent his own pain to the winds. She had closed the door behind him, and now, candle in hand, she leaned against its casing.

Until she heard the outer door close, Betsy stood there, the tears now streaming down her cheeks, then with a hurried step she went to where lay the flag and snatched it from the recumbent figure as though it had been covering a snake. As Vernon felt the folds drawn from him he leaped to his feet.

"Oh, madam!" he exclaimed with fervor, "I have no eloquence to thank you for what you have done. I might better have been sacrificed than have been the means of placing you in this false position!" And the young man advanced, holding out his hand.

"Begone from me, sir," replied Betsy, recoiling as she threw the brilliant bunting over her shoulder, clutching it convulsively and pressing it to her lips. "I can not touch you. I do not know that I have even done my duty. I have sunk my pride and disgraced the nation's flag; disgraced it in its birth. I do not wish your thanks!"

Her tears dried, but her lovely eyes were bright. The folds of the beautiful banner, matching the

Betsy Ross

crimson and white of her cheeks, fell about her, a natural drapery, and as she stood before the man who had stepped back, to him she appeared a veritable and angry goddess of liberty, her sword being the words she used. In open wonder and admiration he stood and looked at his savior. He was about to protest, but his first words were interrupted by the opening of the door to the shop and the hurried entrance of Mrs. Vernon. That lady was much excited, and her gratitude more voluble and demonstrative than had been her son's, for she fairly flew across the room and seized the little widow by the hand.

"Heaven bless you! You have saved my boy! I was in the dark shop in an agony of suspense and heard it all; I could not help listening. I think the officer favors you. Tell me you will have the guard taken off that my son may escape from this dreadful place."

Betsy pulled her hand away. "Madam, do I understand you are begging a favor of me? Has the high come to the low? Is it not always the reverse? Is it indeed *you* who are suing for mercy at *my* hand? Why, less than an hour ago you treated me with contempt."

"O Mrs. Ross, you know——"

"Stop! God forgive me for having taken advantage of your necessities! I do not mean to taunt you; I have more need of mercy than you! Mrs. Vernon, you brought some papers for my sister to sign; do you still insist?"

A Woman's Wit

With a decidedly shamefaced look, remarkable under the circumstances, Mrs. Vernon opened her reticule, and taking out the papers, thrust them into Betsy's hand. The little woman crushed them in her grasp, and the wrath which she had repressed in words shone all over her as she took the candle from the table, and swept toward the door to the shop. Throwing it open, she said :

"Madam, this is your way out! I have nothing further to say to you. Your son is my prisoner!"

Mrs. Vernon looked aghast. Her eyes were at last open to the character confronting her; the uselessness of battling further was plain, and without answering she passed into the shop.

This episode was the last straw to the strained nerves of Betsy Ross. The day and its culmination was too much for her, and as the heroic girl closed the door on her defeated enemy the room swam; the lightning, still incessant, lost its gleam to her. She tottered an instant, then fell forward on her face, unconscious, breaking into a dozen pieces the china candlestick in her hand and dashing out the light.

Vernon sprang to assist her, but at that moment the lightning revealed the shadow of a man at the rear window. With a leap the spy was on the stairway. With one hand he felt for the sword that hung over the landing while he bent forward and watched. He heard a noise at the casement and he saw it swing slowly inward as Ashburn pushed it and peered through the opening. He saw the

Betsy Ross

laced sleeve and white hand, each second brought into brilliancy by the light from the clouds. Had his body followed, Ashburn would have been cut down, but as nothing but darkness and uncertainty met the officer's eye, he softly pulled back the window and disappeared.

"Watch that," he said to the guard who stood close against the wall. "He escaped here once—he must not again."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A FOUL DAY, BUT FAIR

THE spirit of tragedy that hovered about the room in the little house on Arch Street was not confined to that locality. The storm which spread over Philadelphia seemed to drip violence. It certainly had no quieting influence on human passions. The incident of the mistake in relation to the red cloak had grown to mighty proportions in its results, and as the storm raged over the city, so did the error, insignificant in itself, rain its last fruits that day upon those in the least concerned. Humanity pays dearly for its blunders, while the rewards of virtue are not always immediate or easily recognized.

Mr. Lemuel Bass thought the latter late in coming as he gathered his faculties together after his fruitless plunge down the front steps. He was genuinely angry, and his emotion was so great that he felt no pain from bruise or wrench, only the sharp and galling pangs of defeat. To him it was simply inhuman injustice that his erstwhile prisoner should have stumbled upon him by mistake only to be missed a second time.

Fate certainly appeared to be against the watchman. Within a week he had made two essays

Betsy Ross

at obtaining honor and promotion, laudable objects for the ambition of any man, and in both cases he had failed. Boiling with indignation, he started down the path after the escaped fugitive. He had seen the spy disappear through the gate in the wall, and possessed a misty idea that he had turned toward the meetinghouse. If anger prevented the watchman from feeling the pains of his fall it also warped his judgment, for, in point of fact, Vernon had fled in an opposite direction. But this was unknown to the wrathful Bass, who made straight for the oak tree on a labored trot, that spot being a point of vantage whence he could scan the river front, and, indeed, some distance in all directions. The watchman possessed no lack of courage, but courage will not supply breath, and the stout guardian of the peace was in a panting condition when he reached the tree. There he halted and sat down, straightening his badly twisted wig and readjusting the bandage over his eye—an eye wounded and blackened by the fist of the man who had now twice escaped him. Despite his mental perturbation, he was finally struck by the unearthly hue that covered the landscape and the peculiar state of the atmosphere. A ghastly green light fell upon everything. The river lay before him, flat and sluggish; the wet leaves above him hung motionless; there was not a breath of air and the unwonted stillness of the visible universe was impressive. The watchman turned himself about and looked westward. The black pall of the coming tempest had

A Foul Day, but Fair

risen until its edge was at the zenith, and with a natural curiosity Lemuel Bass let his eye follow the black mass until he came to its top. At once a cry escaped him as his gaze penetrated the foliage above him. If the man he was seeking had not taken refuge in the oak, his ghost had, for there, nearly concealed, it is true, showed the blue blouse worn by the spy when first captured.

Though the watchman's satisfaction was great, it did not fill his mind to the exclusion of a keen appreciation of his own astuteness in following, as by instinct, the line of the fugitive's flight. He looked aloft at his intended victim (who doubtless would be dumfounded at being so readily discovered), and the hopeful officer of the law fed on the joy of the next few moments in which the man would be sure to surrender himself. The coming tempest bore no great threat to the watchman as he drew a cavalry pistol and a pair of new steel handcuffs from his pockets, still keeping his eye on his intended victim. Then he shouted:

"Come, now, Captain Bassett, when ye have had a fill o' the outlook let me know!" There was no answer and the watchman chuckled. He indulged himself in a moment of suppressed mirth, then sent up another summons. "Faith, have ye lost breath? Come down, I tell ye! Do ye want me to send a pill up arter ye?"

Save for a distant moan, the herald of the storm, and a light breeze, which rustled the wet leaves and sent down a shower of drops, there was no sound in

Betsy Ross

answer. The watchman looked hard at the supposed man, and waited ; then he sent up another demand for him to come down. The lack of a verbal answer was easily explained by the officer ; chagrin would account for his victim's present silence.

As the rapidly increasing breeze created a commotion above him he saw the supposed figure he was watching shift, and while the moan in the distance grew to a clamor, with grave delight the expectant and impatient Bass saw the blue blouse leave its perch on the swaying bough, and even as he uttered a cry of triumph for himself and warning to his descending victim, there dropped at his feet the forsaken and dislodged garment and cap recently worn by the spy.

Stupefied, the watchman looked into the tree, but his man was no longer in sight. The solution of the problem did not occur to him, nor the next minute did anything enter his head save the necessity of saving his own life, for, as he stooped to examine the cap at his feet, the storm broke.

For a fraction of a minute Lemuel Bass stood his ground, thinking he was facing nothing but a squall which would at once pass ; but by the steady increase of the wind's force, and the howling that accompanied it, he became convinced that something out of the common was about to occur, and putting pistol and handcuffs back in his pockets, looked about him for the nearest shelter. The meeting-house stood hard by, but he knew it was locked, and its little Doric portico faced the coming storm ; there

A Foul Day, but Fair

was no shelter there. The rear of the building, however, would be in the lee and protect him somewhat, though he hesitated betwixt that point and the nearest house.

He did not hesitate for long. As he marked a mighty pillar of twisting darkness approaching, and saw a six-inch limb ripped with a tearing crash from the oak behind the trunk of which he was partly protected, he turned toward the back of the meeting-house and started on a run.

It might have been a comical sight, but it was now a serious matter for the watchman. He had never run so fast in his life. The arms of the tornado (only the skirts of which touched Bank Hill) urged him along until his feet barely felt the earth. The bandage tore from his head and flashed before him out of sight; his white wig followed it ere he had gone thirty steps, leaving his absolutely bald pate unprotected, and the man himself might have been blown bodily down the hill and into the river had he not, in his terror and excitement, thrown himself to the ground and crawled, cowering, the remainder of the distance to his haven. As he entered the comparative quiet of the lee of the meetinghouse he got to his feet and saw, to his intense satisfaction, that the rear door to the building was ajar—the door Vernon had found fastened something more than half an hour before.

Here was shelter and safety if the meetinghouse did not blow down, a matter about which Bass began to feel uncertain. Hastily stepping into what

Betsy Ross

was really the wood room of the building—a room rarely if ever entered in summer, and the character of which was at once apparent in the stack of logs piled against the wall—Lemuel Bass partly closed the door, but kept his face to the opening that he might mark passing events.

There was little to mark in detail. He saw the river turn milk white under the lash of the wind. He saw a boat containing two men who were trying to reach the Pennsylvania bank, overset in a twinkling when within a rod of the shore, and he failed to see its occupants again. The pity in him was lost in terror; he did not give them a second thought. He saw the vessels anchored in the stream reel under the invisible hammer that struck them, but he could not see the damage done to the shipping. The wind, which had howled, rose to a shriek, passing from that to a deafening roar, and the stout building shook as though beset by a battering ram. But a minute more and the prospect was blotted from the watchman's eyes by the mist that followed the van of the tempest.

Lemuel Bass was thoroughly subdued. He would have confronted a desperate criminal and walked up to him, even with a pistol threatening, and taken his chances, but how to defend himself from the results of this awful convulsion of natural forces he did not know. He gave little thought to the man in the tree. No human being could breast the wind then blowing and live, and the idea that flashed across the watchman's mind was that he would find

A Foul Day, but Fair

the body of the spy somewhere on the hill if he himself survived the existing conditions, for, in the judgment of Lemuel Bass, there was little doubt that the building which sheltered him would fall ere many minutes passed ; yet to leave it would be sure death, if not from the wind alone, from the flying missiles with which the air was filled ; to remain in it was to risk burial under tons of *débris*.

Lemuel Bass conceived that his chances were less where he was than above in the body of the church. His rather sluggish brain, stimulated by danger, pictured the horror of being crushed under the heavy timbers he saw overhead, not recognizing that their very weight and strength would be a protection to him. He was too excited to reason clearly, and looked about him in terror.

Panic often clears the eye for detail, even as will great depression or sorrow, and that at a time when detail is a matter of small moment. He saw the piled-up logs left from the fires of the previous winter ; he even noted the pungent odor of the stacked dry wood. He saw the cobwebs, barely visible in the gloom, hanging from the rafters, and he saw, too, a man's garment like a sailor's reefer, a well-guttered candle stuck in a bottle, some scraps of paper and food, and an arrangement of logs and loose lumber that bore a likeness to a bed or bunk. All these he passed over with a glance, the clothing, candle, food, and bed bearing no significance to his brain, which was temporarily past putting two and two together ; past noting the correlation of his " fax "

Betsy Ross

and his "theeries." The only object that struck him as important at that time was the flight of rough steps that led to a trapdoor above, presumably connecting with the body of the building.

As he left his post by the door and ran up the stairs he was amazed at the voice of the storm as it echoed through the hollow hall above him, but pushing up the trap, which moved easily enough, he stepped on to the floor. At a glance he saw that all the glass on the front of the building had been blown in and that a torrent of spray streamed half the length of the great room. Even as he noted it the force of the wind fell, and the downfall of rain and hail that followed thundered on the broad roof and gushed like a wall of ice and water through the shattered casements.

Then came the first great flash of lightning. It flamed through the many windows and blinded the lonely man; the crash that succeeded shook him. White and trembling, he started to retreat to the wood room, whose contracted quarters now seemed safer than the bellowing arch above; the cold array of seats was ghostly, the immensity of the thunderous space too much to endure. In more of a hurry than when he came up, he stepped back on the stairway. He had let down the trap to be rid of some of the noise, and was about to descend to his old post when the door from without, still ajar as he had left it, was dashed open, and a man staggered into the gloomy interior and closed it behind him.

Lemuel Bass was too thoroughly shaken to be

A Foul Day, but Fair

communicative, but the misery he was in was of the sort that most loves company, and the watchman would have undoubtedly hailed the newcomer, save that some instinct within him made him hold his tongue. The man who had thus burst in upon him was evidently hard pressed for breath, for in the darkness he could be heard puffing and blowing, but it did not prevent him from inserting a key in the lock and turning it, for to Bass there came loudly the shriek of the dry and rusty wards and the spring of the bolt.

From that moment the officer had no need of mere instinct to keep him quiet. Why any man should run so far out of true as to lock himself in such a place was a matter of interest to him, even then. What was he doing with a key to the meetinghouse, and why should he use it? He was not the sexton, for the custodian who had taken the place of the murdered Ketch was far too old and feeble to run a step, therefore it was no one with a right to use the wood room.

The fall of the wind and the closing of both trap and door had reduced the noise from without to a minimum, even the claps of thunder being muffled, and the watchman began to regain his nerve as he scented something wrong—he knew not what; at all events, he seemed to have grown to the step on which he was seated as he opened his ears in attention, his only dread being that the man might wish to go above, and so discover him.

But there was no indication of this. Instead of

Betsy Ross

attempting to go to the body of the building, the intruder muttered a few incoherent curses and proceeded to strike a shower of sparks with a flint and steel, but for a long time his efforts to ignite the tinder were without success. At length they were rewarded; the tinder glowed like a faint red eye through the blackness, and the fire was finally transferred to the candle. As the wick flared up it revealed the features of the muttering man, and Lemuel Bass almost came to his feet, for the light had brought out the face of the late slaver—the ex-pirate—the murderer, Joe Bradley.

CHAPTER XXIX

AT CLOSE QUARTERS

BUT it was not the slaver as Bass had ever seen him. He was hatless and reeking with water, which dripped from his hair and sodden clothes and ran down his face. His gay costume had given place to the coarse garments of a common sailor before the mast. The black beard had been shaved off, and the man's brutal jaw showed its character. There was no mistaking the black eye, however, nor the mouth, nor the snaky look of his hair, the water-soaked queue of which hung down his wet back like an unstranded rope. He had cut his mustache so that, though short in the middle, the ends drooped at length, like a Malay's, giving his face a look of additional villainy. The first thing he did was to take a pistol from his belt, shake the wet priming from the pan, and withdraw the charge. The candle threw a strong light upon his desperate face, making gigantic the shadow of his bullet head and broad shoulders as his figure was outlined against the rough wall. The rumble of the thunder filled the air; the dulled roar of the rain penetrated the chamber; the dust-laden cobwebs, like funeral hangings, shook as the building trembled, and the spicy, acid

Betsy Ross

odor of the seasoned hickory came strong to the nostrils.

It was a theatrical and sinister setting, and Lemuel Bass was thoroughly alive to it as well as to the probable outcome of the threatening tragedy. He had wanted the man, but he had never bargained for this. Night after night for a week he had lain in wait for him at the house of the Quaker, believing his man would go there to revenge himself on his old employer; he had dreamed of an opportunity to capture the fellow before him, but he had never pictured it as coming in this fashion. He had always looked to trap the murderer, but it appeared very much as though he himself had been trapped. He was entirely without a plan of attack, for his consternation at his discovery was too great to permit him to think coolly, but never for a moment did it enter his head to act solely on the defensive or let the man get from his reach. Lemuel Bass was no coward. But as he looked at the bent figure he realized that for himself death or honors lay within the next hour.

But yet he made no move to at once accomplish his purpose, nor is it strange that he waited ere attempting to capture the murderer. He knew the desperate character of his man, and he wished to take advantage of the slightest chance in favor of himself, that offered. As far as the weapon in his hand was concerned, the pirate was disarmed, it being empty; but no sooner had he cleaned it and wiped it dry than he proceeded to recharge it from a

At Close Quarters

small horn of powder which he took from his clothing. This move determined the watchman. Before the unsuspecting Bradley had uncorked the flask, Bass, who had gradually worked his hand into his pocket, drew his own pistol and cocked it.

If he had expected the slaver to at once surrender to the odds against him he was disappointed. That was not what happened. As the click of the pistol lock sounded through the now comparatively quiet room Bradley did not even look up. The metallic snap spoke volumes to him, and, as though the watchman's action and his own were one, in a flash he blew out the candle and dropped to the floor. Pitchy darkness suddenly enveloped the two men—pitchy save for the lightning that flared between the door and its sill and through a crack in the lower panel, making a luminous line, but throwing no radiance into the black interior.

This totally unexpected move in a measure reversed the tables, and Bass realized it quickly, and as quickly shifted his position from the stairs to the floor, where he stood still and tried to locate his man. He had no fear of his opponent's pistol, but he dreaded the knife that he guessed had been drawn, and he dreaded the catlike leap he felt fairly certain would come from the darkness in front of him if his intended victim could get an idea of his whereabouts. Each man waited for the other to locate himself; neither dared shift his position, or speak, or, for that matter, scarcely breathe. The situation was a desperate one.

Betsy Ross

In the silence that ensued Lemuel Bass stood with ears alert. His quickened wits were working fast. He dared not fire his only shot on an uncertainty, but for him to do something was becoming imperative, for the watchman's nerves, unused to such conditions, were stretched like overtightened harp strings. As he stood there, anxious and expectant, he heard a stick clatter against the wall and fall to the floor. The sound came far from the point at which he had seen Bradley sitting, and at first he thought the man had worked his way across the room. He silently shifted the point of his weapon and was about to fire, but held his hand as he considered the possibility of its being a trick, for the thing sounded too much like an object thrown against the wall for the sole purpose of leading him astray. If he could run up the stairs, lift the trap, close it, and fasten it before Bradley could interfere, he could command the outer door from the window above it and have his man caged. He had little doubt of his ability to open the trap in a hurry and even close it; but how could he fasten it? To leave it open was to bring on a hand-to-hand conflict, which would only end with the loss of life of one or the other, and the watchman thought of his wife and considered he was taking sufficient chances as it was. But he must risk it. He was standing but a trifle from the stairway. His head was within a foot of it. Three strides would bring him to the trapdoor above him, and he had about determined to break for the stairs—had even strained for the

At Close Quarters

rush, when the second great flash and crash startled him from all thought of his project and sent him staggering against the wall.

It did more. The shock was terrific, and its stunning effects greater than it had been in the little shop, for the bolt had struck the oak hard by, splitting it from top to bottom. As Bass reeled against the wall he gave a convulsive grasp with his pistol hand and the weapon exploded with deafening effect in the close room, the bullet going he knew not where.

Thoroughly demoralized, but still with no idea of seeking safety by flight, and only desirous of obtaining light and air, the watchman followed up the discharge by hurling his empty pistol with all his force in the direction of the extinguished candle; then supplementing the rolling thunder by an insane yell born of his overtaut nerves, he threw consideration to the winds and leaped to the door.

And it was well he did not stop to question his instinct. The unimaginative brain of Bradley had not been overset by the storm nor by the crash following the lightning, for his familiarity with danger saved him from losing his head. He had not seen his would-be assailant, but, far from being desirous of acting on the defensive, he only wished for an opportunity to come to close quarters with his enemy. If he could have located him, the wild dash in the dark which Bass had feared would surely have come. He tried the stratagem of throwing a stick into a far corner, hoping it would determine his

Betsy Ross

unseen foe to some action, but the watchman had not been simple enough to take the bait. He dared not try the door, for he knew the chances were against getting out that way alive, and if he did, he would be chased and captured unless he could first cripple his pursuer. The ex-pirate was not young or fleet of foot. Sailors are poor runners, as a rule.

It was plain to Bradley that he must close with his antagonist or get a long start of him, and when the crash came and was followed by the shot, he saw his opportunity. The pistol which had been thrown went over his head and both men leaped at the same moment, each passing the other in the noise and darkness. The slaver found space where he expected to find a man, and knowing now that his way out by the door was blocked, and believing the shot to have been a ruse, as his last hope of escape he continued up the stairs and pushed open the trap just as Bass turned the key and threw the door wide, only to see his man escaping above him.

Any latent timidity held by the watchman vanished in the comparative flood of light that filled the wood room. He was partly blinded by the sudden change, but he could see Bradley with his body half through the trap at the head of the stairs. His blood was now well up, and though unarmed save with the light jeweled dagger, which was still in his pocket, he made for the escaping man, who had barely time to get on to the floor above ere Bass was after him. In fact, the now desperate watchman was after him

At Close Quarters

so closely that the slaver was caught by the ankle and whirled to the floor before his pursuer had got his whole body to the level above. With the force of the fall Bradley's knife flew from his hand, but before the officer could gain the top step and throw himself on his quarry, the slaver had struggled to his feet, and without hesitation, but with a villainous oath, flew to meet his antagonist, and in a trice the two unarmed men were locked in wrestling embrace.

In the beginning the outcome of the combat was a matter of doubt, for the men were more closely matched than was at once apparent. As to age, both were well past fifty years. While the sailor undoubtedly had the more hardened muscles and was more at home in a hand-to-hand encounter than was his antagonist, the watchman had the advantage of sheer weight, better health, owing to his simple life, and, moreover, he was backed by his official position, his rectitude of purpose, and the stake for which he had longed and waited—three factors exerting a great though unseen force in a struggle of the sort taking place between Bass and Bradley.

The policy of the latter was plain enough. Unable to recover his knife before his opponent could get to him, he had leaped at the watchman with the hope of driving him backward into the yawning hole in the floor, and had almost succeeded, for under the shock Bass fell back until his foot was within six inches of the opening.

The strife had not become a wrestling match in

Betsy Ross

its true meaning; indeed, save for the hold, there was nothing akin to it. Neither made an attempt to trip the other. Bass did not, because for him to change his footing for a fraction of a second meant his instant defeat, and the slaver made no attempt, because he saw even then how hopeless it would be to waste his strength in trying to upset the ponderous form he held in his embrace. It took the watchman but a few moments to determine that the conflict was to be one of endurance rather than skill, and that it behooved him not to lose his breath by violent and abortive exertion. At that supreme moment his head was clearer than at any time since he had left Griscom's house, and the plan of the man whom he gripped was perfectly plain to him.

The contestants swayed from side to side in silence, for beyond the oath uttered by Bradley as he sprang on the officer, not a word had passed between the two men since the door below had closed on the ex-pirate. Their very dumbness showed the intensity of the purpose of each. Above them the roof thundered under the impact of the falling flood, and the lightning, which at this time had become almost continuous, threw its fitful radiance over the struggling men.

Tug and strain as he would, instead of bettering his enemy, Bass found himself going back little by little, and at the rate at which he was receding but a few minutes would elapse ere his foot would slip into the hole behind him. Under the unrelaxing pressure the small matter of the six inches or less

At Close Quarters

which had intervened between him and defeat shortened to a scant five, and then to four. If the watchman had any plan to execute, it was about time to do it. His absolutely bald head shone under the perspiration that started out on it, and his scalp turned the color of a cockscomb. The horrible face of the murderer was close to his. The black eyes, half closed, looked insane, and the two yellow teeth seemed to hang from his parted lips. The officer's hatred was crowned with intense disgust for his antagonist. The situation had reached its climax: he must take a broad chance or lose all.

With a sudden relaxing of his whole body he stepped back, taking the risk of having his left foot land, as he had calculated, on the steps. It did. As he felt its firmness under him, with a powerful pull he drew his straining enemy after him. The slaver, seeing his own danger, slackened his hold and tried to pull back, but it was too late; his previous exertion tended to his own destruction. Bass jerked him onward, let go his grasp, and clutched the floor to save himself, while the pirate whirled by him, striking the foot of the steps on his head and shoulders, and rolling to the ground, lay still.

In a moment more he was securely ironed, and the watchman, thanking God the while, sat puffing and blowing on the stairway as he looked down upon the unconscious man at its foot and waited for him to regain his senses.

CHAPTER XXX

A DELICATE SITUATION

It was Saturday morning, the day after the events just described. The weather was magnificent. The unseasonable storm, the equal of which none remembered, had cleared the air of its accumulated heat and foulness. There was a light, crisp blue to the sky which reminded one of early fall. There was a freshness to the cool, rain-washed air that was intoxicating after the heat and closeness of the preceding days. Under the brisk breeze the trees rustled in gladness; the grass bent and kissed the earth in delight; the very spirit of the glory of the day showed in the springy step and ready smile of the passer. There was a mirrorlike clearness to the prospect, and the shadows cast by the brilliant sun were sharp and dark. The birds and all living things reveled in the beauty of the morning. Nature had been in travail; the earth had been born anew.

The sprightliness of the conditions seemed to be reflected in the looks and actions of the genial Mrs. Bass. With a broom in one hand and a duster in the other she was putting the finishing touches on the little back parlor, humming a tune as she bustled

A Delicate Situation

about, with a voice which expressed more cheeriness than music. It was to be a great day for her. General Washington and the committee from Congress were to sit and contemplate the new flag in that very room, arranged and cleaned by her, and on that very morning. Mrs. Ross had decided that the shop was too public—besides, she wished her parlor honored. Mrs. Bass was sharing a secret belonging to the commander-in-chief. She swelled with importance. It was true that she could not kiss him, as she had once expressed a wish to do—she might not even see him, but she could kiss the chair he would have sat in and glory in having the confidence of a confidant of the great man.

Yet there was a fly in her cup of happiness that morning. Her husband had left her hurriedly the day before with a badly blackened eye and a badly bumped head, and she had not seen him since, he never being at home now. She was inclined to worry over it, only on such a day, with such sunshine and such a breeze, she could not harbor aught but the pleasantest of thoughts. As she half-drew the snowy muslin curtains over the window, picked a dead leaf from the geranium, and turned the pot of heliotrope that the light might better strike it, she looked about the tidy and tasty room with arms akimbo.

“Well, General Washington may have seen finer parlors than this, but he never seen a cleaner, that I’ll warrant.”

She flicked away a speck of dust from the ma-

Betsy Ross

hogany chair, and then, with hand uplifted, stopped short.

"There it is agin! I vum, if there's not a man in this house there's a ghost! I can hear his boots as plain as day!"

Whether the good lady referred to the boots as being worn by a man or by a ghost was not plain, but she was diverted from her misty speculation by the appearance of Mrs. Ross, who entered from the shop.

The little widow was dressed in something finer than her workaday costume. From her pretty foot in its silk slipper to her prettier head, the hair of which was arranged in a mode more becoming to her sweet face than was the rigid and homely style then prevailing, she was natural in effect; and that at a day when Nature and natural emotions were either smothered entirely, grossly exaggerated, or hidden from the sight of mankind. The only Quaker trait she possessed was her dislike for mourning badges, and her silk dress gave no hint, either in cut or color, of her past affliction. The lace about her round throat and dimpled wrists was of the finest, though made by herself. She wore no jewelry save the ring on her finger, but her brown eyes shone like diamonds as she smiled at the old lady.

"It is lovely, Mrs. Bass, and very kind of you to save me so much trouble. Will you go to the shop now, and if any one calls in the next half hour tell them I am particularly engaged? Please don't disturb me."

A Delicate Situation

"Why, of course, my dear, I'll do anything to help you. No one sha'n't bother you. Land sakes! but you're pretty enough to—to eat!"

Betsy laughed.

"Kiss me, then, you dear old thing! If I'm as pretty as you are good I'll do very well." And innocent youth and innocent age embraced.

With the disappearance of Mrs. Bass and the closing of the door departed the look of content from Betsy's face. She hesitated a moment, then, as if determined, lifted the edge of her petticoat and hurried upstairs. In a few moments she returned, and following her on tiptoe came Clarence Vernon, appearing to better advantage than when, the night before, he was wet, disheveled, and but half-dressed. Now he wore a neat suit of dark purple clothes once belonging to the late John Ross.

"We need fear no interruption here, sir," said Betsy, turning to him as they reached the floor and marking his curious and somewhat suspicious glance around the room. "See! We are alone. I could not talk with you where you—where my sister might possibly hear us. I have looked to our security."

Vernon stepped forward and held out his hand.

"Madam, pray let me thank you now. I have had no opportunity since——"

"No, sir," said Betsy, ignoring the outstretched hand. "I neither desire nor deserve your thanks. You are yet a prisoner."

Betsy Ross

"Ah, too well I know it! But I can thank you that I am alive at this moment."

"You may thank Fate for having woven the conditions that protected you, sir. But it is not for this that I brought you here, but a matter of more importance to me. I would ask you if you believe a woman capable of patriotism in its highest and fullest sense?"

Vernon, who had lifted his hand in protest at the cold refusal of his gratitude, let it fall as he answered:

"Why not? Her sacrifices are as great and as freely made as a man's."

As he spoke, Betsy walked across the room to the hair trunk and threw up the lid, exposing the flag which had been completed early that morning. Then turning to him she said:

"I am such a woman, Captain Vernon, for now I know your right name. See! Do you know what that is?" and she pointed to the standard.

"I think I heard you tell Lieutenant Wheatly, last night, that it was the new American flag."

"Aye, sir, it is! It was given to me to be the maker of the first flag. A greater honor or a prouder no woman could have had bestowed upon her. And it was also given to me to be the first to dishonor it. How have I betrayed that honor? By making this emblem shield an enemy to my country—a spy—more—a villain!"

Vernon raised both hands and made a step toward her.

A Delicate Situation

"No, madam, no!" he cried protestingly. "An enemy, perhaps—a spy, if you like—but not a villain!"

"I said a villain, sir. It was not from mercy that I did what I did, but for my sister's honor!"

"How? Your sister's honor!"

"You were legally married to her, were you not?"

"Most assuredly!"

"And yet you will avail yourself of circumstances—circumstances seem to favor you, sir."

"What do you mean, madam?"

"You would avail yourself of the absence of the chaplain, witness, and the town record, to be free from her!"

Vernon's eyes opened wide and his brows contracted.

"I! Who told you this?"

"I have it on the best authority, sir. It came from none less than your mother. Look at this—this is a document that I have been led to infer you heartily indorsed." And Betsy drew from her bosom and held out to him the paper Mrs. Vernon had surrendered to her the night before.

The young man was too astonished at the statement to answer her. As he reached for the paper he instinctively knew the treachery of his mother, and felt the nature of the trick she was trying to play on both his wife and himself even before he knew the miserable offer the document contained.

Betsy Ross

His face grew white and rigid as he read, and he crushed the paper in his hand.

"Oh, infamous! infamous! May God forgive my mother! I never dreamed of the existence of this thing! I—I indorse this by word, deed, or inference? Madam, I love my wife with my whole heart—my whole soul. Why else am I here?"

"Why? As a spy."

"Yes, and no. A spy in fact but not in purpose. I was forced to volunteer as a spy that I might come at all; and I did it for her sake—risking all. I came to her immediately."

"Your mother saw and talked with you a number of days since."

"Aye, a week ago—here in your shop—and while I was talking to Clarissa, who had just arrived—not before nor since. I forbade my wife telling you or any one. You see I was a spy—my life depended on strict secrecy."

Betsy looked steadily into the eyes of the man, who met her gaze without flinching. For a moment her face lighted as though from relief. And, indeed, she was relieved, for she felt the truth of his statement borne to her both by his manner as well as the logic of events; moreover, it could be proved by her sister. Clarissa's happiness would not be ruined through her husband's faithlessness, at least. But her own case looked dark before her.

"Captain Vernon, you force me to believe you, thus far, and I am happy to know that I can, as I do, withdraw the term villain. I would that I could

A Delicate Situation

make my own case as clear. You have made me your ally, whether or no. To-day, in all probability, the guard about my house will be taken away, for my work is completed. The only visible stain upon the flag is a drop of Lieutenant Wheatly's blood, and that he shed in trying to capture you. But its invisible stain troubles me. I have shielded a spy—I have dishonored the flag. It has covered a British officer. Nothing but punishment to you or to me can cleanse this stain, but, Captain Vernon, I can not be the means of hanging my sister's husband to save myself or my peace of mind. Your path will be clear this afternoon. You will then be free to depart. I shall send your wife to you as soon as you are safe. No, sir, do not speak. I am but a woman. My duty to my country I have outraged, but I will not be false to charity—to pity; I will not outrage my God—my better nature. I am but a woman, sir; but I will bear this burden alone—and its punishment, if need be. I will atone for this sin—which were no sin were you not what you are. You are free, sir!"

Vernon looked at Betsy in admiration. There was no contrition on his face, for he had done nothing of which to be ashamed, but he bowed his head as he recognized the nobility and true heroism of the inspired little woman, who seemed to grow in height as she grew in his respect. With a smile of extreme melancholy he answered:

"But I shall remain, madam—if not as your prisoner, as Lieutenant Wheatly's."

Betsy Ross

"I told you he would soon be gone with the guards."

"Mark my words, madam, he will not. *He knows I am here!*"

"*Knows* you are here!"

"Mrs. Ross, I am happy in having two enemies who are friends perforce. You will not bear your burden alone. I am no dullard—even when hunted. Lieutenant Wheatly would lay down his life for you. I sincerely congratulate you. He is a noble man."

"*Sir!*"

"Hear me out. When you went to the kitchen, presumably for a light (for you bore one back with you), Lieutenant Wheatly stepped to where I was lying and placed his hand on me. I was about to spring up, but he held me down and said: 'Captain Bassett, remain where you are while I am in this house. Without, we are enemies. She loves you, but if you dare dishonor her before me by betraying yourself, I will shoot you like a dog.' These were his words. Would you have me interpret them?"

Whatever Betsy Ross might have thought concerning the outrage she had offered her country by covering the refugee with its flag, she never dreamed her motive could be so thoroughly misconstrued by Lieutenant Wheatly. To know that he believed Captain Bassett was concealed as her lover—for so she looked at it—was a monstrous and humiliating shock. She had nerved herself to sacrifice a sentiment for the love of and the peace of her sister, but this was another matter. The fact that her affection

A Delicate Situation

for her old *fiancé* had not abated one jot, despite appearances against him, despite what he might have done in the past, was borne strongly upon her. Must she sacrifice this too with the rest? Without a doubt Ashburn would further stultify himself for the pure love of her, and give the spy free passage from the house, but she would not bribe his honor to save her own by asking. He had not condoned the spy's offense through his refusal to openly discover his hiding place. Vernon was still in durance. The lieutenant's hand had only been held to save her. He had shown no more pity for the refugee than had she. It was circumstance alone that protected her sister's husband, who, to the man she worshiped, was her own clandestine lover.

It was a horrible and degrading thought. She shook the bars of the unintentional trap she had set and fallen into. She had tried to save her sister and had ruined herself. The misery of it surged through her brain as surged the blood through her body, the latter making her red and white by turns. Her hands clasped and unclasped. She looked about appealingly at the cruelty of the blow. Shame and anger fought within her; and the last found words.

"Sir—sir, where was your manhood that you did not rise and explain? He would save me, as an American, from the consequences of my act, your silence dishonored me as a woman! Have I not borne enough without this? And this for a foe to his own birthplace—a renegade!"

"Nay, nay, madam! Could I allow myself

Betsy Ross

to be shot down when a few words might explain? I knew not then what you have just betrayed to me—that you love Lieutenant Wheatly. Have no fear, Mrs. Ross. Neither my life nor my love is so dear to me that I can allow you to be sacrificed for them. I shall deliver myself to Lieutenant Wheatly and explain. I shall——”

She interrupted him.

“Captain Vernon, you doubtless heard me refuse the consideration Lieutenant Wheatly offered me last night when I told him he might search the house.”

“I did.”

“In the same way I refuse your present help. The mischief is done. You will *not* deliver yourself and kill my sister. My sacrifice would then have been for nothing. Be assured, sir, I do not need your intervention in my affairs. If you did all this, the flag would still remain dishonored.”

While the little woman's words were commanding, her look did not bear out her spirit. Extreme dejection marked her features.

“Perhaps, Mrs. Ross, I may be as obdurate as was your—as was Lieutenant Wheatly. I am by no means sure that my wife would be made a widow. And on the other matter let me correct you. I am a renegade, and an enemy to my country only by mischance. My heart is forever hoping and praying for its success.”

Betsy turned on him.

“How? What is this you are saying?”

A Delicate Situation

"The truth. Like Lieutenant Wheatly, to whose partial confession I was an unwilling listener, I, too, have a secret which made it necessary for me to leave my country and change my name. I wrote my parents of my trouble, and they purchased me a commission in the British army. The paper was antedated three years. This was nearly four years ago. Much to my chagrin, my regiment was ordered to the American colonies on the breaking out of the war. My mother, as you doubtless know, is a rabid Royalist, and she held the knowledge of my crime over my head in order to prevent me resigning, as she knew I wished to do. This, however, I was resolved upon, and so wrote my father, but a sudden knowledge of my wife's necessities demanded immediate action in her behalf instead of my own. However, I immediately sent in my resignation as a British officer and hurried toward Philadelphia. At Trenton I received the note from my wife which brought me here. In reality I am not of the British army, but must appear so, as my resignation had not been accepted when I entered the American lines."

As he spoke a great change came over Betsy's face. She bent forward in her eagerness. An unconscious smile betrayed the light that had come to her. Her clasped hands covered her heart.

"Is this true—*true*?"

"Every word—so help me God!"

Betsy looked at him with swimming eyes.

"And Him I thank! Sir—Captain Vernon—

Betsy Ross

brother, then there is a chance to save the honor of the flag, your life, and my self-esteem!"

"How?"

"By surrendering yourself—though not to Lieutenant Wheatly."

"To whom, then?"

"To General Washington. I expect him here shortly—with the flag committee."

"*That!* That would be certain death. I am a spy, remember."

"Ah, yes; but if what you have told me is true, you would be willing to join the Continental forces?"

"Yes, gladly. But do you not see that my desire would appear as a subterfuge to escape the penalty over me. You speak of General Washington as if he would help matters. He will not. He was a lifelong friend of my father's until this wretched war. I have seen him many times. Washington is a stern and rigid man where duty is concerned. It is because I know him that I realize the hopelessness of your suggestion."

"Oh! Then what is to be done?"

Vernon was about to answer, when both were startled and interrupted by the loud voice of Mrs. Bass in expostulation, and a sharp knocking on the door from the shop. Betsy pushed down the lid of the trunk, flew to the door, put her foot against it, and, placing her finger on her lip, motioned Vernon upstairs.

Like a shadow he fled, and as he disappeared

A Delicate Situation

Betsy opened the door. The worn face of Lieutenant Ashburn confronted her. He had aged overnight.

The girl gazed at him in pity—a look that would have lightened his heavy heart had he seen it, but he spoke without raising his eyes.

“Mrs. Ross, I have the honor to report the coming of General Washington.”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE CRISIS

It was an hour later. Lieutenant Wheatly walked up and down the floor of the shop, against the closed door of which stood an orderly. Within the little back parlor were General Washington and the Congressional committee discussing matters relating to the flag, but the door of the room was shut and the officer had received orders to allow no one to enter.

Outside the sun shone clear and bright. The carriage which had brought the great men stood glittering in the light, and the colored coachman on the box paid no attention to the remarks of the gathered crowd that eyed him and the squad surrounding the vehicle, with the stupid, lingering, and aimless curiosity peculiar to the idle and vacant-minded.

But the officer had no thought for the equipage, or his men, or the crowd; not even for the flag, the committee, or the commander-in-chief himself. He thought of Betsy, because he could think of little else, and of the spy whom he had found hidden; and the very obvious fact that the name and person of Joseph Ashburn had no further power to move the woman he had loved—and did love. She had

The Crisis

concealed a man—a British officer—a spy—and, of course, for no other motive than love of him. She had refused a knowledge of past relations with himself, and had cast him off—finally. The word “final” still rang in the young man’s ears.

He was torn betwixt his hopeless love and his duty; and whichever was to conquer mattered little to him so far as the object of his affections was concerned. She was lost forever. To Lieutenant Wheatly, or Joseph Ashburn, the star of happiness had set and darkness loomed ahead.

But there was one matter on which he was settled, and that, that the spy should not escape. Although each hour his rival remained in the house was gall to him, he would not and could not compromise his love by dishonoring her, as he must do by capturing the man while under her roof. But outside the case would be different, and outside Captain Bassett should not step without being arrested. Jealousy, that twin brother of selfishness, beset the officer with strange temptations and abominable suggestions, but he put them aside with high-minded firmness; he could suffer, but he would not suffer basely.

That Captain Bassett was yet within the house the waiting officer had no manner of doubt. Part of his present acute misery arose from the fact that he had heard the spy’s voice, and heard it plainly, as he had approached the door to notify Mrs. Ross of the coming of Washington. He had made out no words of the conversation, nor would he listen, but

Betsy Ross

he was strangely alive to the fact that the tones of the unseen man were firm and without fear, and that his person had been concealed between the time of the knock and the tardy opening of the door. It was a terrible blow to Ashburn's affection, but he was loyal to the memory of his old love and to his determination, made the night before, not to protest again. Vengeance never entered his head or his heart. His duty toward Betsy was plain, but what his duty toward the spy should be was a matter that troubled him.

The noisy opening of the shop door interrupted his thoughts. A soldier hurried in, and with a quick salute to the officer held out a letter.

"From General Arnold at headquarters to His Excellency. Immediate delivery requested."

Ashburn acknowledged the formal salute.

"What's the trouble, Morely?" he asked as he took the letter.

"Can't say for certain, sir. Hell's to pay down at the jail about a man caught. The provost wants him an' the sheriff won't give him up. That's all I know, sir."

"Very good. Wait outside."

The fellow saluted again, swung on his heel and retired. Ashburn stepped to the parlor door and knocked. The door was opened by Betsy. The officer dropped his eyes and said:

"An important letter for His Excellency." And turning, he resumed his walk, by no means quieted by this additional sight of his lost love, and the touch

The Crisis

of the smooth fingers which had accidentally met his as he passed in the paper.

Presently the door reopened, and down the steps came Mr. Ross and Mr. Morris, bearing between them the hair trunk containing the new flag.

The soldier's musket rang as he brought his piece to "Present." The officer clicked his boot heels and raised his sword in salute as Washington appeared behind the two portly congressmen.

"Gentlemen, you will never carry a more honorable burden," said the commander-in-chief with a stately bow as he held the door open behind them.

"Lieutenant Wheatly, parade your company, detail an escort, and then come to me here." And Washington turned abruptly back into the room.

After completing his duties Ashburn went to the parlor. The commander-in-chief sat on a chair reading the recently delivered letter, and Mrs. Ross stood at a respectful distance. Washington's face had lost its smile, and a frown knitted his brow. As the officer entered the room the general looked up.

"Mrs. Ross," he said, "I shall be obliged to transfer headquarters to your house for a moment. May I write a note?"

His voice was pleasant, but his face did not change.

Betsy went to the bookcase and let down the lower part, which, open, disclosed a desk. Washington arose.

"Lieutenant, you will be my amanuensis, if you please. Sit and write as I dictate."

Betsy Ross

He threw the letter he had been reading on to the desk, and the officer saw the concise signature of Benedict Arnold. He had no time to see more, for Washington spoke up sharply.

"Direct to General Arnold as from headquarters. Ready? Write:

" 'SIR: The civil authority must not be forced by the military. Your statement seems incredible, but it is possible the man has been trying to serve two masters. The papers found on him should be sent to me by bearer at once. I shall remain here waiting for a report from Congress, and will then start for Bordentown, where further particulars may be sent. You might suggest a court-martial as a favor, but we can not force it as a right.'

"That will be all, lieutenant. Thank you."

The officer dropped the pen and arose, while Washington sat down and signed the paper with more labor than is indicated in his well-known signature. He spoke as he folded the note and directed it, and the officer contemplated his broad back instead of looking at the attractive little widow who stood near him.

"Lieutenant Wheatly," said Washington, half-turning, but not looking up from his work, "this note I wish delivered to General Arnold, who will be found in his house, in all probability. Bring back the packet he will give you. You are relieved from duty here. The occasion for the guard no longer existing, you may withdraw your men."

The Crisis

Betsy's hand went to her heart. The officer started.

"Your Excellency," said Ashburn, "may I ask to be permitted to maintain the guard for a time longer?"

Washington wheeled about on his chair and looked up in some surprise.

"But do I not tell you the necessity no longer exists?"

The officer hesitated a moment and wet his dry lips with his tongue.

"A necessity *does* exist, Your Excellency!"

"Ah!" said Washington, with a quick glance toward Mrs. Ross. "And of what nature?"

"I must beg that Your Excellency will not press me to make known its nature, but rather trust to my honor as a soldier to do a soldier's duty."

An answer of this kind was something with which the commander-in-chief was evidently unfamiliar. His gray eye played rapidly over the face and form of his perfectly respectful subordinate, and with a knitted brow he returned:

"But I *do* press you to answer, sir. I am in the habit of having reasons for the use of my men!"

Ashburn turned in open and unmilitary appeal. For the nonce he forgot himself; the trouble on his heart made him blind to the value of policy or finesse. For his own case and cause he said the worst possible thing:

"I beseech that Your Excellency will ask no questions—that you will make this an exception

Betsy Ross

when I tell you that my honor and the honor of the nation depends upon the retention of the guard."

It was not the custom of General Washington to be either abrupt or violent in manner or speech, but he was human. To have his orders questioned by one of his own generals frequently brought out the fact that the father of his country was a son of Adam, but to be questioned by an officer whose commission was of the lowest grade was something he had never yet experienced. Noted for his control of temper, he held it back in words, but his light gray eye was not pleasant to look at as he arose to his feet with considerable vigor of motion and confronted the young man.

"And do you, sir, tell me, your superior officer, that there is some reason for the use of an armed force which *you* may know, but which *I* am not permitted to know?"

Ashburn's heart sank under the look and words, but he stood his ground, and never flinched in appearance as he saluted and answered:

"No, no, Your Excellency! It is not that—but——"

"Be careful, sir. I am forbearing, Lieutenant Wheatly, yet there is a limit. Is it because of the presence of the lady that you will not speak?"

"No, Your Excellency, it is not."

"And you still decline to give me reasons! I will be more lenient than you deserve. Withdraw your guard, sir, and return them to their quarters."

The Crisis

Ashburn's face blanched. His knees shook beneath him as he stammered:

"Your Excellency—you—I—I—I can not——"

That Washington was no saint became apparent. A flush overspread his pale face, and his eye flashed upon his subaltern. He wheeled about abruptly.

"By God, sir, this is too much! Lieutenant Wheatly, are you mad? This is gross, sir! You are under arrest!"

With a heartrending certainty that she was the cause of the scene, and that her lover was about to ruin himself to save her, Betsy stood with clasped hands, listening to the foregoing dialogue. As the commander-in-chief looked with both anger and scorn at the individual who had presumed to disobey his official fiat, the little woman stepped forward with a cry.

"Oh, General—oh, Your Excellency! It was for me——"

"Silence, madam!" interrupted Washington. "Your intercession is useless at this time! Surrender your sword, sir!"

Ashburn returned his superior's stern glance with a look of absolute humility. He drew his sword from its scabbard, bowed, and taking the weapon by its blade, held it out without a word of protest. But the wrath of his commander was by no means calmed, for Washington's temper cooled as slowly as it showed itself. He pointed to the table.

"Place your sword there, Lieutenant Wheatly. Deliver this note to General Arnold as instructed,

Betsy Ross

and report your arrest to him in person. You shall receive your desert later. Begone, sir!"

Without a sound to betray his anguish, without a glance at the woman who had attempted to intercede for him, the disgraced officer bowed again, took the note, saluted, and marched from the room.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE INTERVIEW

IN the humble opinion of Betsy Ross, Washington was no longer great. He had been unjust to the man she loved, and, what was more, though not so hard to bear, he had snubbed her suddenly and harshly.

With little appreciation of military necessity, and the heights to which discipline had been forced even in the lax organization of the Continental army, her soul revolted at the cruel injustice of being forbidden to defend the innocent, and at that moment she was willing to sacrifice herself, her sister, and her sister's husband, to maintain the right. Indeed, she was about to open her mouth in an impolitic protest, when the door, which had but just closed on Lieutenant Wheatly, was opened by his corporal, who announced that Judge Vernon and his wife desired to be admitted.

"Do you know their errand?" asked Washington.

"They speak of seeing Mrs. Ross, Your Excellency."

"Let them come in," was the curt return; then, addressing Betsy, he said:

Betsy Ross

"I am acquainted with your callers, Mrs. Ross, but if this is a matter of particular business, I will retire."

"No, Your Excellency, it is not to see me. It is to see their son that they have come. And, sir, it is he who has caused the trouble to Lieutenant Wheatly. Oh, if Your Excellency had but let me speak!"

"Madam, I would not have you credit me with injustice. You know little, as a lady, of military affairs. You may speak now, however, as the culprit has gone."

"Oh, sir," said Betsy, clasping her hands appealingly, "indeed, he is no culprit! It was his love and his duty——"

Washington held up his hand.

"Ah! I begin to see. Did the gentleman wish to maintain the guard to keep you from escaping, Mrs. Ross?" he asked, the harsher aspect of his face softening as he looked at the attractive woman before him.

Betsy blushed furiously, but the answer she was about to make was stopped, for at that moment there appeared at the door the judge and his still overdressed wife.

As Mrs. Vernon caught sight of General Washington her knees weakened. To her his presence indicated that her son had been captured and the general was there to pass sentence on him. The emotion that plainly showed upon the face of Mrs. Ross seemed additional evidence to this small-brained

The Interview

woman, who suffered in her own peculiar fashion on account of the position of her only child. It was an alarming situation to the lady, and to her the most potent weapon in defense of her son was flattery to the power that held him, though it was a power she hated. Therefore it was with a somewhat forced air of pleasure and surprise that she glided across the room. Ignoring Betsy, she courtesied deeply as she came near Washington, who stood with his hand resting lightly upon the desk.

"Oh, Your Excellency, I am delighted! I did not dream of this—this unexpected pleasure. It is a long time since you have honored our house with your presence. We have seen little of you, though we have heard much." The last words bore a touch of bitterness.

Washington bowed in return, and as he shook the hand of the little judge he said:

"War is an exacting taskmaster, madam, and leaves scant time for social duties."

"Your inference encourages me, General Washington," began Judge Vernon, but he was promptly interrupted by his wife, who came a step nearer as she spoke:

"It is most opportune, Your Highness, that I called while you were here. Your great heart will not wantonly bereave a poor mother. You will be lenient with my poor Clarence."

At the unusual title Washington frowned, but his look of displeasure was lost in bewilderment as he

Betsy Ross

glanced from the lady to her husband and onward to Betsy, as though seeking an explanation. The little widow's face showed intense interest, and as she caught the eye of the commander-in-chief she broke in:

"All this trouble coils about him, Your Excellency! Let me explain, for you know nothing as yet."

Mrs. Vernon looked aghast. She drew herself up with a jerk, opened her mouth as though in need of more air, and ejaculated faintly:

"*Knows nothing!* Oh, I have ruined him!" And the horror of the stricken woman showed in her face.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Washington, with a touch of very human impatience. "To whom do you refer? Do you mean your——"

"Oh, general!" interrupted Mrs. Vernon, pushing aside her husband, who was preparing to speak. "It is Clarence—my son—our son—the most unworthy son of a worthy father."

At this decided assumption of the rôle of spokeswoman Washington smiled grimly, and his face lost its puzzled expression. With a slight unbending, he said:

"Madam, I know nothing of the son, but I am more in accord with you regarding the father to-day than I might have been yesterday, so greatly do circumstances color opinions."

It was Mrs. Vernon's turn to look bewildered.

The Interview

"Circumstances, Your Excellency! What circumstances?"

"A simple one, yet impressive. Justice Vernon called at General Arnold's headquarters this morning. I did not see him, but I was told that your husband there took the oath of allegiance, and, perhaps what is more to the purpose, donated two thousand pounds to our cause."

"Oh, *indeed!*" said Mrs. Vernon, recovering herself and casting a venomous glance at her husband. "Then we may hope this will help Your Excellency to extend clemency toward us——"

Washington knitted his brows and looked helpless. "Madam," he said, "I must be very stupid, or——"

"Mrs. Vernon is very ambiguous and impolitic," broke in Betsy, past restraint, and blind to the exalted rank of the man she was interrupting. "Your Excellency," she continued, "Clarence Vernon is in this house as my prisoner. Mr. Wheatly guessed as much, and it was for this he wished to retain the guard; for this—to see their son, I presume—Mr. and Mrs. Vernon have come."

"Ah!" said Washington, as he turned and gave his attention to the animated and lovely girl, a smile lighting his features, which had clouded as he found himself interrupted. "You are speaking in parables; possibly you mean a willing prisoner—a prisoner of the—the gentle——"

"I mean, sir," said Betsy, flushing rosily and

Betsy Ross

cutting him short again, "I mean he is a prisoner of war—a British officer—taken here by me."

"Ha!" returned Washington, with sudden interest and a darkening countenance. "Within the lines! Was he disguised?"

Betsy simply bowed. Mrs. Vernon gasped and was about to speak.

"Forbear, madam," said the commander with a sudden assumption of severity. "This, then, is the substance of the matter I was stupid in seeing. Your prisoner is a spy. And why, if Lieutenant Wheatly knew of a spy being in this house, did he not enter it and capture him?"

"Sir," returned Betsy, drawing herself to her little height, her cheeks burning and her eyes shining gloriously as she came to the supreme moment of her life, "he has taken every precaution; he has caused the house to be surrounded. He did not find—he did not *wish* to find the man beneath my roof, because—because, Your Excellency, *he would not dishonor me*. The fault is mine, sir, the misfortune his. I stand ready to take the consequences, for it is I who have shielded this man."

Washington, whose face had been growing sterner and his mouth so set that his lips appeared but a thin straight line, looked at the heroic woman and said:

"I fail to see it in your light." Then he turned to Judge Vernon and spoke with asperity. "Sir, is it to this circumstance and with the hope or ex-

The Interview

pectation of diverting justice that you took the oath this morning? Was your donation a bribe?"

"Upon my honor as a gentleman, General Washington, you wrong me," returned the judge. "I knew nothing of my son's danger until within an hour, when my wife informed me of what I should have known a week ago—that he was in Philadelphia. Your Excellency, what I did was done honestly, and if you will but read this letter, which I received from Clarence last week, you will be convinced that he is not a spy—except in appearance."

Judge Vernon spoke earnestly and with dignity, and ended by handing to Washington the letter he had withheld from his wife. The commander-in-chief glanced over the writing carelessly, then, with sudden interest, stepped to the window and began reading with intentness.

No one moved or spoke. Betsy stifled the emotion in her breast and dropped her eyes before the searching glance of the judge, who appeared to be mightily attracted by the beauty of the defiant girl, and as her gaze fell it encountered the letter from General Arnold, which lay on the floor at her feet, it having been brushed from the desk by the general's sleeve as he first turned upon the rebellious officer. As a diversion from the steady look of the lawyer, Betsy stooped and picked up the letter, and mechanically her eye ran over the bold writing which displayed one of the characteristics of the man who was soon to be the most famous traitor in history.

Betsy Ross

The lines were dashed across the paper in evident haste, and each word burned into the heart of the woman who read them.

“YOUR EXCELLENCY: The provost marshal informs me that in the jail lies one of your agents—Joel Radley, the privateer captain—taken on the charge of murdering one Thomas Ketch some time since. He has confessed the crime. Papers found upon him lead me to believe that he has been acting in the interests of General Howe, but whether to cover his relations with you, or *vice versa*, I can not determine. I have demanded the prisoner, but have been refused by the civil authorities. Were you beyond the lines I should act as seems to me necessary, but under the circumstances defer to your judgment. Immediate decision is desired, as the man is about to be moved to Lancaster.

“In haste,

“B. ARNOLD, *Brigadier General, &c.*”

The flood of light that broke upon Betsy dazzled her. Her lover was not the murderer she had pictured him. What the cause of his disguise might be, and the personal offense to her it contained, were lost sight of in the intense relief that came as she read the paper. Her knees shook and she sank into a chair silently, like a tired child, just as Washington finished reading the judge's letter and turned around.

The general's brow was still knitted, and his

The Interview

whole expression was that of a man grappling with a problem.

"Judge Vernon," he said, "your son is an accomplished villain or an extremely conscientious man. In this letter he tells you that he is about to penetrate the American lines on account of a necessity, which necessity consists in a desire to see his wife. He tells you that he may be obliged to volunteer as a spy in order to get permission to leave his regiment, and he also tells you that his heart is with the colonial cause, and—in spite of his mother's wish, and in defiance of certain of her threats to expose him for some crime, the nature of which does not here appear—that he has already resigned his commission in the British army, though said resignation has not yet been accepted. This is an extremely serious matter for your son, as his ingenuity is of no avail, the contents of this paper but a pretense. He sends his father a letter which he hopes will enable him to escape the consequences of his act if he is caught. The character of a wife in necessity comes in conveniently. He can show no proof of his resignation, and even had he the paper in his pocket he might still be a spy. Spies are not all British officers. By his own confession he is both. Whence this sudden love of the colonial cause? Was he forced to accept a British commission or to retain it? Did he ever protest his love for America before? Did he ever denounce the tyranny of England? If so, where is the evidence? What has been brought in extenuation? Sir, my duty is the pres-

Betsy Ross

ent consideration of my life; my necessary decision, that your son must stand the investigation of a court-martial."

Judge Vernon was stricken dumb as the mind of Washington probed the letter from the side of suspicion. The lawyer, who had drawn many briefs, and who had made a business of twisting truth and falsehood, had not dreamed for one moment that his son's letter could be aught but convincing of his innocence, and looked for it to be the "open sesame" to the door barring him from freedom. Yet it had turned out to be but an additional barrier—an indication of deliberate intention to enter the American lines as a British spy.

To Washington it appeared that Clarence Vernon, instead of being a victim of circumstances, had played a game with circumstances.

"Your Excellency!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, catching at straws as she reeled under the blow of the decision. "If you will only see my son—he is here—he will explain."

"I would not see him now for any consideration. Madam, I will not allow myself to be prejudiced," returned Washington.

His voice was as kindly as a father comforting a suffering child, but his determination was made apparent by his very calmness. He turned his back to the room and looked out of the window. So far as the prisoner was concerned, the interview had terminated. His act was a tacit dismissal of the matter.

To Betsy Ross, who, since her interview with

The Interview

Clarence, was as certain of his truth and innocence as she was now certain of the innocence of her lover, this decision was inhuman. That a man could be so prejudiced as to refuse to listen to an appeal was a monstrous state of mind to her. Against the stern dignity of the American general, the horror-stricken face of Mrs. Vernon, and the dumb pain of the judge; against the entire coil of circumstances which seemed about to strangle an innocent man, her brave and womanly heart revolted. The spy had done nothing in reality; she had done much. She it was who had betrayed his presence; she would protest for him.

With the same upright defiance with which she had faced the commander-in-chief before, she stood and said:

"General Washington, if Clarence Vernon suffers for a shadow, I should suffer for the substance. It was I who sheltered him by concealing him under the unfinished flag, thereby dishonoring it. It is I who have sinned, for I misled Lieutenant Wheatly, or tried to. If Mr. Vernon is to be a prisoner, I should not be overlooked. I knew the penalty for sheltering a spy."

General Washington stood without moving until she had finished; then he turned around, biting his lip to keep down a rising smile.

"Madam," he answered, "you seem anxious to incriminate yourself; but one who takes a prisoner—for you informed me the spy was taken by you—am I right?"

Betsy Ross

Betsy bowed.

"Then one who takes a prisoner and who voluntarily informs the authorities can hardly be called culpable, except for delay, and delay is not always a crime. You also speak of dishonoring the flag. If it is never more dishonored than by your act it will be superior to any standard yet made—or to be made. Do not be carried away by sentiment alone. The flag represents the public—the national policy—not the individual. *You* can not dishonor the flag, Mrs. Ross. It is too great to be insulted by one bearing no authority. I might dishonor it by making it protect a wickedness, even as England has dishonored her banners by making this iniquitous war. Moreover, Mrs. Ross, if you are determined to deal with fine points, the flag you made is not the national standard until it is accepted and declared such by Congress."

He spoke quietly, as was his habit, and turned to Mrs. Vernon.

"Madam, do not think that I am thirsting for the blood of your son. He will possibly establish his innocence by proofs. I only wish to say that I will not interfere with the finding of the court.—Mrs. Ross, will you be kind enough to call the corporal and produce your prisoner."

As Betsy turned to comply with the request there was little joy in her heart. General Washington had indeed pricked the bubble of her fallacy and made her self-sacrifice seem useless. She felt a temporary relief in knowing that she was not considered cul-

The Interview

pable, but there was the man's inflexible determination in regard to her sister's husband; and who would tell Clarissa that Clarence was to be court-martialed as a British spy?

Betsy's heart was low as she reached the door and laid her hand upon the latch, but at that moment a knock sounded on the panel, and as she opened the door the girl found herself again confronting her disgraced lover, Joseph Ashburn.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CLOUDS BREAK

WITH a formal bow and a lowering of his eyes, which told how thoroughly he had accepted his dismissal from her, the officer passed into the room and strode across the floor, his empty scabbard jangling loosely at his heels. In his hand he bore a small packet wrapped in oilskin. Taking no notice of the Vernons, he stepped up to the commander-in-chief, saluted, and stood awaiting permission to speak. Washington looked at him with anger visibly growing on his face. Scanning the subaltern from head to foot, he suddenly asked:

"What are you doing here, sir?"

"Bearing papers at the command of General Arnold, Your Excellency." And Ashburn extended the packet.

"Did you report your arrest, sir?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"I can not understand it!" returned Washington, as he took the packet and laid it upon the desk by his side. "Why did General Arnold select a disgraced officer to do his errand—and what are these?"

"May it please Your Excellency," returned Ash-

The Clouds Break

burn mildly, "these are the papers found upon Joel Radley, now in jail; transmitted to you by your order, and by your order, also, they were to be brought to you by the bearer of the note you gave me. What to do under the circumstances was puzzling to General Arnold."

Washington clasped his hands behind him and looked searchingly at the young man. Ashburn returned the gaze with respect, but did not lower his eyes. After a moment, which passed with complete silence throughout the room, Washington spoke:

"Lieutenant Wheatly, perhaps I have been hasty with you—certainly in holding you responsible—as I did—for your return. I remember my instructions in the letter. Your offense has been great, but your motive was harmless—perhaps praiseworthy. You have been ably defended, but never let your affection get the better of your duty again. There is your sword, sir.—Mrs. Ross, deliver your prisoner to this gentleman.—Is my carriage at the door?"

"It has just returned, Your Excellency," said the astonished lieutenant.

"Then I will wait no longer. Detail an escort, deliver your prisoner to General Arnold, and report your release from arrest, then follow your detachment to Bordentown. Bring those papers with you and report to me by to-morrow before noon." He spoke briskly, and turned to the others. "Mrs. Ross, I bid you adieu; I shall not be likely to forget you. Sir and madam, I trust we will meet in happier times." And with a dignified and graceful bow,

Betsy Ross

which comprehended those he addressed, Washington took his hat from the table and walked from the room.

For a moment Ashburn stood stock still. It was hard for him to realize the situation. He had been spoken to of his duty in relation to his affection, and his sword had been returned to him. What had been said in his absence? Could Betsy have held him up to the commander-in-chief as her infatuated and hopeless lover and begged for his pardon out of sheer pity for his suffering? It was a degrading thought, and as this solution flashed across him, manlike, a desire to somehow make the girl pay for her past cruelty entered his heart. But with only a flush showing on his face to express his feelings, he turned, caught up his sword, and without deigning to cast a look upon the woman who had saved him, hurried after his general.

On Betsy, whose heroic mood fell from her like a garment as Washington left the room, the cut was lost. She was vibrating betwixt relief and unhappiness—relief that the honor of the man she loved was unstained, and unhappiness at the blow she would be obliged to deal her sister. The poor girl had been sorely beset, and beyond the slight support given by Washington, had stood alone. Circumstances had made it impossible for her to ask advice from any one, and at that moment the future looked sinister. Hurt pride and a sense of duty under awkward conditions had compelled to cast aside the advances of the only man she had ever loved, thereby

The Clouds Break

compromising her own character in his eyes. From the same sense of duty she had finally delivered to justice her sister's husband, and had thereby condemned herself to a suffering even greater than that caused by her sacrifice. She was to witness the agony of Clarissa. She was to cut with one hand and comfort with the other by pretending to hope while hopeless, and at the same time hide the gaping wound in her own breast.

Little wonder was there that the three remaining in the room were motionless. Each was stricken by a sorrow that each bore characteristically: Mrs. Vernon bursting into moans and expostulations the moment Ashburn left the room; the judge biting his lips and walking to the window, out of which he gazed in seeming vacancy, his hand tapping his snuffbox nervously; and Betsy, pale and, in appearance, without emotion, standing with her eyes fixed upon the door at the head of the stairs.

It was thus that Ashburn found them when he returned. As he re-entered the room Judge Vernon advanced and spoke.

"Sir, lieutenant, may I not see my son before you take him away?"

Ashburn hesitated.

"You should ask permission of Mrs. Ross. I do not know you, sir; and Captain Bassett has not been passed into my hands."

"You have that right, certainly," said Betsy, answering the unspoken appeal of the lawyer, who had turned to her.

Betsy Ross

"Let me assure you, sir," interposed Ashburn, "that any attempt on the part of Captain Bassett to escape will be fatal to him. The house is surrounded. I will leave you in privacy for a few moments." Then, turning to Betsy, he bowed with the greatest formality and concluded: "Madam, at your convenience, I would like a word with you." And bowing again he withdrew to the shop.

As he had done more than an hour before, he again paced the length of the room, forward and back. He was about to have a final interview with his old love, but what he would say he had no idea. His request to her had not been born of anything but impulse—a desire to see her alone for one moment more and make her suffer, if possible, and yet he did not wish her to suffer. He would woo the candle that had singed him. He would look into her eyes and perhaps touch her hand. He would have one moment of delicious misery and then endeavor to recover from its effects. His weakness was identical with that of the opium eater—his only antidote a repetition of the cause of his unhappiness. Had he been less weak, he would have been less loving.

Yet his senses were acute enough and alive to all that passed in the room he had left, for the door remained open. He heard Betsy's light footstep as she went up the stairs to summon the prisoner. He heard the upper door open, close, reopen, and close again, and heard the heavy tread of the man as he came down. His words of greeting were lost, as

The Clouds Break

was lost most that followed. The officer then abated his interest, for he knew that Betsy had remained above.

He paced his beat mechanically. He was in no hurry. It was small comfort that his love and he were under the same roof, but it was a comfort. Such a child is love. He presently awoke to the fact that all was not going smoothly in the next room, for after some strong exclamation from the prisoner and a confusion of voices, he heard plainly and forcibly uttered :

"Father! father! Is this true—honestly true—and you know it?"

"I have it on the authority of Mr. Griscom himself, and the man has been captured," was the answer.

There was a groan from the prisoner and he burst out :

"I have not feared death, but for more than three years I have feared hell. So it is you, madam, who has been feeding me with fire—who kept me from joining the cause I should have fought for long since. And you have accomplished nothing. I resigned my commission two weeks ago. From this moment I am a Vernon again."

Ashburn pricked up his ears. The name of Vernon had struck him. He heard something like a woman's wail, and stopped in his walk. There was an inarticulate answer, but it was interrupted by the prisoner, who broke out :

"Madam, was your hatred for America greater

Betsy Ross

than your love for your son? When you saw me last you knew I was no murderer, and you knew the tenderness I felt for the woman you chose to hate. For the first, you withheld the information which would have made me and my dear girl leap for joy. You would have won the affection of a daughter as well as strengthened my weakened love for you. For the second, you attempted to dishonor her and by inference made me a party to the act. It is monstrous! Monstrous! May God forgive you! It is you who have delivered me up while I am in a false position. On your head be the result. Oh, my love—my poor love!”

As from a man to his mother this was an awful denunciation, and it was most impressive. The deep tones of the speaker needed no gesture to make his words eloquent of feeling. As the man ended in a heartbroken sob Ashburn heard the door at the head of the stairs open, and at the same time a shriek from the lady and a heavy fall told him the accusation had struck home. His impulse was to interfere, and catching up his dangling sword he turned to run up the little stairway when Betsy appeared on the top step so suddenly that she almost collided with the hurrying man. Lifting her hand as though to forbid his passage, she closed the door behind her and motioned him back; then advancing, she said:

“It would be better not to intrude just now. You can do nothing. I—I am here at your request. What do you wish to say to me?”

She was singularly pale, singularly beautiful, and

The Clouds Break

very calm. She had just seen her sister and had left her unsuspecting—hopeful—happy. The song the wife sang to the babe at her breast hurt Betsy; the light that shone from the young mother's eyes stabbed her. It was for her to quench the light and silence the music, and that within a short time. She could not endure the sound and the sight. She had left her sister to receive the last words of her own lost lover. It was a weary world for Betsy Ross; life was but a slow tragedy.

Ashburn looked on her with a heavy heart, and yet so engrossed was he in the girl before him that the next room, its occupants, and the drama being there enacted, were entirely driven from his thoughts.

The apparent lack of emotion in his old love maddened him; her beauty drove him wild. From the tiny point of her slipper that showed from under her silken petticoat, to her soft, round, and white throat, which rose from a nest of lace, he noted every detail of her person. The lock of brown hair that curled on her neck; the deep, dark eye that hid a world of tenderness—not for him; the rounding bosom with its wealth of love—not for him, made his heart sick with hopeless longing. And all this was for the man in the next room whom she had protected, whom she was still protecting, and for whom she was doubtless inwardly grieving. For a moment Ashburn stood and drank of the bitterest cup he had ever tasted; then he lifted himself above his selfishness.

Betsy Ross

"Madam," he began. "Nay, I will not belie my nature—Bessie, why have you done this?"

She showed no resentment at the name nor at the question. She did not lower her eyes. Her hands, which had been hanging at her sides, she brought together and clasped the fingers.

"What have I done?"

"Done! I hope for annihilation if hell offers worse suffering than has been inflicted upon me—and for what? I am but human, but I would have struggled with the flesh and won had you not chose to degrade me. Why did you not deliver that man to me last night? Why did you not force him from the house? I knew you sheltered him, and you suspected as much. Why did you prefer to deliver him to Washington, who must show no pity, rather than to me, who would have saved him at a hint from you?—though the door that opened to his happiness ushered me to torments! Why did you cause me to be disgraced for doing my duty? Did you *ever* love me? I would have shown more pity to a dog!"

Beyond the sudden flush that overspread her face at the last remark there was no sign of anger. She made no movement save to slowly untwine and re-twine her small white fingers, nor did she take her eyes from his. Gradually two great tears welled up, overflowed, and dropped to her bosom, but she made no attempt to wipe them away. Finally she spoke, and her words came as though she was very weary:

"Is it a lasting love that will degrade its object even in thought? Had I not loved you as Joseph

The Clouds Break

Ashburn do you think I would have resented the insult you offered me by denying me in private and insisted on wearing a false face until you feared—you feared I had compromised myself? I have done you an injustice in thinking I knew your secret. I do not, but I, too, have a secret. Do you know who this man is—this man on whose account you have further debased me, although you had no right?"

"No."

"Do you wish to know?" Her voice was very gentle.

"I know he is a spy and that his name is not Bassett."

Her eyes opened wide.

"How do you know this?"

"I overheard it but now. My God! I have heard all—even his appeal to his love—to you—you whom I have always loved! And yet I—I—I will save him."

"For me?" she asked, a wan smile coming to her lips.

"Yes. By that I may save my own soul. I would not have you suffer as I have. I first thought of revenge, but one can not love and hate at once."

Betsy straightened herself. She had loved this man, but she had never probed the depth of his character as at that moment. Years before she had set him upon the pedestal erected by her affection, but now the pedestal suddenly towered. He was above her, not below. His was an offer of great sacrifice, and its greatness justified his past. It blotted out

Betsy Ross

all fear of what he might have done. But she indulged in no heroics; she simply said:

"Joseph Ashburn, you are a noble man. Save him, if you can do so honorably to yourself—only honorably. The man is Clarence Vernon, my sister's husband!"

The young man looked at her a little wildly, yet with an intuition that something was about to occur.

"*Clarence Vernon!*" he exclaimed. "Your sister's husband!"

"Yes."

"Judge Vernon's son?"

"Yes."

"Impossible! I killed him four years ago—or have I been cursed by a shadow only?"

And with a dazed look he turned, ran up the steps, opened the parlor door and entered the room without ceremony. By the broad window the prisoner and his father were bending over the half-unconscious figure of Mrs. Vernon, who had been lifted to the window seat, and all were unaware of the rapid approach of the officer. Ashburn paid no attention to the hysterical woman, if, indeed, he noticed her at all, so completely was he absorbed in his own thoughts—his own hopes and fears. Could he be an innocent man? The idea was tremendous. He almost ran to the prisoner and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the spy, whose back was toward him.

"Captain Bassett!"

The Clouds Break

The young man swung about. It was evident he did not recognize his old antagonist.

"Have some pity!" he said. Then appealing to Betsy, who had followed Ashburn into the room, he continued imploringly: "Mrs. Ross, I beg you to use your influence; I can not be dragged away now.—These are my parents, sir."

Though it was the first time he had seen his face since the memorable night nearly four years before, Ashburn knew his man at once. A stone seemed to roll from him, but with a struggle to command himself he returned:

"Only for a moment, sir, only for one moment! My God! You have come from the dead! Clarence Vernon, *don't you know me?*"

The spy, who on his appealing to Betsy had immediately turned his back upon the speaker with barely a glance at him, now wheeled about and scrutinized the officer, the wonderful expression of whose face was enough to command attention. He knitted his brows with a puzzled expression, and then started back.

"By the great Jehovah! You are—I killed you— You are *Ashburn!*"

That gentleman could control himself no longer.

"No—yes!" he cried. "I am Ashburn! God be thanked, my soul is white again! Is it a dream?"

The two men stood staring for a moment, then by common impulse rushed into each other's arms.

Through Betsy's brain the light, which had begun to dawn at her reading of Arnold's letter, flashed

Betsy Ross

clear as she fathomed the misunderstanding that had held her lover in a false position. The judge uttered an exclamation, and Mrs. Vernon sat up and gazed in wonder at the two men, who, with glistening eyes and in close embrace, were patting each other on the back and thanking God alternately.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BETSY COMMITS A FELONY

LATE that afternoon Betsy came downstairs after a terrible ordeal with her sister. Forced at last to explain the continued absence of Vernon, she had broken the facts to Clarissa as gently as possible, and that poor girl had suffered as only the young wife and mother can suffer when bereft of her husband. At first she was wild to go after him, but that being a physical impossibility, she had at last collapsed and on her recovery, determined to write. It was for writing materials that Betsy had come down to the parlor after promising to bear the letter to headquarters, see the spy if possible, and bring back some word that might comfort the prostrated wife.

The little widow's own cup was about full. Through the explanation of the two men she now understood the motives which led them to conceal their identities, but not until they had left the house did she find out that the mistake which had caused the trouble had arisen through the transfer of the red cloak from her sister's shoulders to her own, and that her lover's false position was due to his attempt to defend her name.

All this had come out in her conversation with

Betsy Ross

Clarissa, whose knowledge of part of the secret, which she at last detailed to her sister, made the entire matter plain.

In mind Betsy humbled herself before her lover, who had been true to her, but it was too late to do more. Their parting had been cool enough. Ashburn had bowed low over the hand she held out to him, but the fact that she made no effort to detain him, and that from the girl's own lips he had received his final dismissal the night before, made him resolute to ask no favor. Had the opportunity offered, it is more than probable the young man would have had nothing to complain of in the way of a lack of encouragement, but the chance did not come. Amid the lamentations of the mother and the hopeful words of the father, Clarence Vernon had yielded himself a willing prisoner to Ashburn, and they had gone.

But Betsy had expected her lover's return. She had been expecting him all the afternoon. With the clearing of the misunderstanding which had altered the lives of those concerned she felt sure he now realized the reason for the position she had taken, and would come to her possessed with the same longing that filled her own breast.

But she became hopeless as the afternoon waned. She remembered, too late, that she had refused to listen to his explanation the night before; and forgot that the word "final" had been spoken—because she had not meant it. She was not willing to throw herself at her lover's feet and beg, but she

Betsy commits a Felony

was willing—more than willing—to right herself in his eyes, as he, without effort, had already done in hers. So desirous was she to do this that it was through her suggestion Clarissa had determined to write to her husband, for by being the bearer of the letter Betsy hoped to see her lover (for such she called him to herself) once more. Fate might be kind; anyway, she would be doing her duty in trying to right the wrong she had done her old *fiancé*.

She went to the desk that still stood open, and was about to gather up some paper when her eye fell on the letter from Arnold to Washington, which she had picked from the floor. She knew nothing of its importance, but guessed it had been overlooked in the confusion, and then, to her greater astonishment, along with it she saw the packet of papers which Ashburn had brought to the commander-in-chief. It was plain they had been forgotten, and happily, too, the girl thought, for in their return to him lay the best possible opportunity for her to once more come face to face with the man she most wished to see. As she took the packet in her hand and lifted it she noticed the covering was loose, and suddenly the small sheaf of papers slid from its slippery oilskin wrapper and fell to the floor, where they scattered in all directions.

As she regathered them she could not help noticing their character. Some were but small bits of paper bearing only the name of a person or a town, with some figures and, invariably, the points of the compass marked on some portion, generally a cor-

Betsy Ross

ner. They bore the look of ciphers. One was a large and rough road map of a locality unknown to her, and another was a mass of lines covering one side of the paper; while upon the other was an array of marks and figures, many alike, with here and there a detached cross or a word and an inky streak that seemed to be meaningless. It was only by accidentally holding the paper to the window that she discovered the relation of one side to the other, for the two unintelligible maps, by the transmitted light, fell together into a very fair plan of a city and a river, presumably Philadelphia and the Delaware, with all the latter's points and shoals, and the depths of the water clearly marked, together with the weak fortifications about the town, and all the roads leading into it. It was an exhaustive plotting of the topography of some locality; a very ingenious map, and was clearly the work of one who wished it to be unrecognized for what it was. The girl laid it upon the desk with the rest and picked up the last paper, which was folded and sealed. It had fallen face down, but as she turned it over she saw it bore this direction :

“ For Delivery to

“ Capt. Roger Bassett,

“ From Headqtrs., H. M. Forces,

“ Transmitted.

New York.”

“ By Col. Spencer.

“ —th Dragoons,

“ New Brunswick.”

Betsy commits a Felony

In her great interest the girl almost broke the seal closing the document, but suddenly thinking that this might be a paper which would in some way affect her sister's husband, she wrapped all the matter in the original cover, and taking with her the writing materials hurried upstairs. She said nothing of her discovery to Clarissa, and, after placing Mrs. Bass in charge of the shop, in something like a half hour later, with the letter to the spy and the packet, she was on her way to General Arnold's headquarters. She knew nowhere else to go.

As she turned into Walnut Street and approached her goal she saw a number of horses with cavalry equipments hitched before the general's house, but there were no officers about, nor seemingly any one, save an orderly, standing on guard at the front door. The girl passed him without opposition or question, her heart now beating rapidly at the thought of how Ashburn might receive her. She asked for Lieutenant Wheatly of the first person she met, a corpulent soldier, and was shown into a plainly furnished anteroom, smelling strongly of old tobacco smoke, while her guide departed in quest of the officer.

She heard doors open and shut, sounds of laughter and the tramping of heavy boots, and after a time the man returned and reported that Lieutenant Wheatly, not being under Arnold's command, was not on record as to his movements. He was not in nor did any one know where he was. This was disappointing. Betsy then asked if she could see the recently captured spy, and was told that he was

Betsy Ross

in the city jail and none could see him without permission from General Arnold, and that General Arnold was out for the present, but was expected back at any moment.

This was another blow. The poor girl seemed thwarted at every turn. What to do was a matter to be determined at once, for the man who had attended her stood waiting for her answer, glancing keenly at her the while, though his manner was perfectly respectful.

Betsy's first impulse was to deliver the letter and packet to the waiting soldier, to be given by him to Arnold, but she instantly afterward realized that the harm she would do Ashburn by such a move would be irretrievable, as showing an apparent carelessness on his part. The papers had been placed in his charge. General Arnold must not know of the remissness. To deliver Clarissa's letter to the jailer for transmission to Vernon would do her sister no good, therefore she determined to wait and appeal to the head of the department, Arnold himself. In the meantime her lover might arrive.

She told the waiting soldier she would remain until General Arnold returned, at which information the man saluted and withdrew, leaving the girl alone.

For a time she sat on a chair, the image of patience; then, as the minutes passed, she arose, and walking to the window, looked out. The shadows in the street gradually lengthened as the long summer day drew toward its close. The horses hitched before the house nagged and stamped at the swarm-

Betsy commits a Felony

ing flies. Once in a while an officer rode up, leisurely dismounted, went into the house for a time, then came out, and as leisurely rode away. There was but little stir and no excitement. Philadelphia was not then being menaced.

Betsy's patience was beginning to be severely taxed when she saw a chaise attended by an officer on horseback drive up. The man who got out and entered the house was in uniform, and she noticed the deference paid him by the officer who assisted him to alight, and by the orderly who drew himself up and saluted with great stiffness and formality. Instinctively the little widow felt that here was General Arnold, and became sure when she noticed the decided limp in his walk, and remembered that since the battle of Saratoga, in which he had been badly wounded in the leg, Arnold could not mount or ride a horse without great discomfort, and went his rounds and made his visits in a light chaise. She heard his deep voice and the trampling of feet in the barren hall, but for a time no one came to notify her of the general's arrival.

She still stood by the window and waited, her heart beginning to beat high again. Outside, the hostler tied the general's horse among the others, then followed his master. The girl was diverted a moment later by the novel formality of changing the guard at the front door, and she noticed the stupid, stolid look of the man who relieved the orderly. She was tapping the floor with her foot in her impatience, when the soldier who had ushered

Betsy Ross

her into the room re-entered and informed her that General Arnold was now ready to see her and to follow him.

As Betsy entered his room she saw the great man sitting at a large and handsome flat-topped desk, which was covered with papers. His left leg was stretched out under it as though he was afflicted with a stiff knee, but as the girl approached, he arose from his chair, his dark and rather saturnine face relaxing as he noticed her unmistakable beauty.

General Arnold was then in the prime of his life, so far as his powers were concerned. His rather fine features were well marked, especially his aquiline nose, but his countenance was not pleasing owing to its swarthiness and the deep frown, which looked to be habitual, that gave his face an expression of surliness. It is more than probable that even then he was deep in his secret correspondence with the British authorities, and that already had been laid the train the premature firing of which led to his subsequent ruin and disgrace. He was undoubtedly a man of wonderful possibilities.

"Madam," he said, sinking into his chair and throwing out his stiff leg, after having heard Betsy's request to see Vernon, "you can not see Captain Bassett at this hour. He will be tried by court-martial to-morrow at noon. You may see him for an hour after ten o'clock in the morning, and after the findings of the court, but not to-day. I will pass in the letter from his wife, however."

Betsy found nothing to do but forward the note,

Betsy commits a Felony

and she held it out timidly. Arnold turned to the man at his side and said sharply :

"Deliver this at the jail at once; see that it is passed to the prisoner. This is a special order."

The man took the note without a word, saluted, and left the room.

"Is there anything else, Miss—Miss——"

"Mrs. Ross, sir."

"Oh!" returned Arnold, with a deeper frown as he picked up a paper from the table. "Then that is all, I believe."

Betsy hesitated.

"Can you tell me where I can find Lieutenant Wheatly, sir?"

"Wheatly! Wheatly!" he returned, with a touch of impatience in his voice. "Of what regiment? Oh, yes; on Washington's escort from Middlebrook! Yes; I recollect. He is on his way to Bordentown by this. I sent some papers with him."

"How long ago, sir, may I ask?"

"Why, let me see. I met him making for the Front Street road as I was coming from—but no matter. I recall his piebald horse, and he had his corporal with him. Will no one do but Wheatly, Miss—Mrs. Ross?"

"How long ago did you say, sir?" asked Betsy timidly and with a little gasp at the knowledge that her lover had gone.

"Two hours, at least."

The girl's heart sank. She did not like to ques-

Betsy Ross

tion the man before her, neither did she like him. His beady black eyes snapped as they glanced from the paper he held. They wandered over her face and figure in a way that made her afraid and angry. His look was both impudent and impatient.

With a simple "I thank you, sir," she turned and went into the hall. She wanted a chance to think, and almost unconsciously she returned to the anteroom. What could she do? Stronger and stronger came the realization that it would be a serious matter for Ashburn if he appeared before Washington without the papers left in his charge. She distinctly remembered the order for him to follow Washington and bring the papers with him, and this delinquency on top of his recent disgrace might mean terrible punishment—even a loss of rank or dishonorable discharge—and the thought made her frantic.

Yet what could she do? Ashburn by this was eight or ten miles on his way, even if traveling leisurely. It was twenty-five miles to Bordentown by the river road, and even had she been able to send after him she did not know that he could be overtaken. She gathered that from Arnold having seen her lover on the Front Street road—so called—or the direct road along the Delaware, he had gone the shortest though roughest route instead of crossing the river and traveling by what was then known as the "West Jersey" road. That much was fairly certain, and that was all, save that he rode his piebald, an animal she knew well enough from having seen

Betsy commits a Felony

it hitched near her door each day for the past week.

That Ashburn should get the papers without the authorities knowing they had been forgotten was imperative, considering his welfare alone. It was doubly so now that the girl felt sure the sealed paper would somehow decide the fate of Vernon, and his trial was to take place at noon the next day. She knew how short was the sitting of a military court, how little time was wasted, and how summary the execution of its sentence. Legal quibbling had no power to defer matters there. Under the existing conditions she saw the probabilities were that Vernon would be found guilty in a two-hour session of the court, and be hanged as a spy at sunrise the day following. It was a chance to retaliate for the execution of Nathan Hale, and with an officer of the same rank. To open the document, find its character, and submit it to the authorities might save Vernon, but it would sacrifice Ashburn—and he had suffered enough at her hands.

The brave woman had nerved herself to a desperate pitch of determination as she walked from Arnold's office to the little anteroom. She would sacrifice anything to get to her lover, and even as she tried to think how it could be done, she felt the minutes were being wasted. Not a soul did she know who could take her place, nor could she lose time by hunting for a substitute.

As she walked to the window her fine brows were gathered and the flush on her cheek was

Betsy Ross

feverish. One glance into the street, however, furnished her with a clew, and she set her little white teeth in a wild resolve. She needed no strength at that moment. She was a giantess in her ability, she thought, if good fortune would give her a start. Without stopping to consider conséquences, only placing her hand on her bosom to be sure the precious packet was still under her corsage, she walked rapidly from the house as though she knew exactly what she was about. She was only afraid the sentinel would interfere with her, but he was evidently both raw and stupid, for he barely lifted his eyes to her as she ran down the steps. No one else was about. Going directly to General Arnold's horse, she unfastened it from the hitching post, and stepping lightly into the chaise, drove away.

Not daring to look to right or left for fear of seeing some one who would hail her, she went down Walnut Street to Front Street at an easy gait that she might not attract too much attention. She was aware that Arnold's equipage would be recognized, but that did not trouble her if she was not stopped. Down Front Street to Arch, and up to her own store, she drove, and astonished Mrs. Bass by appearing before the door. Telling the good woman that she might not be at home until late and not to worry in any event, and leaving an encouraging but ambiguous message for her sister, without further words, for even seconds seemed precious, she turned again toward Front Street and drove off.

Along that street she went, fearful of the bad

Betsy commits a Felony

characters that infested the water's front, but the hand of the Lord was over the little widow, for her errand was born of love alone, and she at last found herself on the Front Street road, the glistening river on one side, before her the open country, and the city behind.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RIDE

IN all her life the poor girl had never approached a position such as she was now in. She realized that she was doing a tremendous thing, but it never occurred to her to turn back on that account. The world might say what it pleased. If she was not overtaken and arrested for stealing General Arnold's horse and chaise before she accomplished her object she cared nothing.

The brisk northwest wind, balmy with the coming night, fanned her hot cheek, while the mild behavior of the powerful animal she was driving reassured her, for among her fears had been one that the horse would prove either vicious or unmanageable. It obeyed her word and touch so readily that she lost most of her timidity on account of the brute, and when she came to where the road was fairly good she urged him forward as fast as she dared. The vehicle swung and jerked alarmingly, for the river road was miserable for wheels, and the storm of the day before had washed it badly; but she shut her red lips tight, and keeping her eyes strained ahead, trusted in God for the ending.

Anon she passed men on horseback who looked

The Ride

at her curiously, for a woman, and especially a young one, driving alone at early nightfall was an unusual sight in those days. But no one offered to molest her, nor did she think it yet necessary to inquire of those she either met or overtook as to the passing of an officer on a piebald horse.

She did not know the road to Bordentown, but she argued that there was little chance of missing it before overtaking her lover, for the broad Delaware, never long from her sight, was always a guide, and somehow a comfort in her growing loneliness. As the time went and darkness came down, her enthusiasm waned, and she became a little frightened; but the horse, with an instinctive knowledge that his oats would not be found on an open road, kept up his speed and pounded along with an energy that seemed at last to be communicated to his driver, for the driver plucked up her courage, smiled through her tears (which now and then would come), and urged him faster.

It was a lovely summer evening. Through all her trouble and anxiety the girl could not help noticing the beauty of her surroundings. She heard the twanging bass of the great frogs and the trill of the tree toads. She felt the damp that rose from the bosom of the river, and noticed the deep mystery of the shadows that lay on the sides of the darkening road. The sky was of a velvety softness, and though the west yet bore a delicate pink flush, the stars were sown thickly, and the Milky Way glistened like a sun-touched cloud.

Betsy Ross

She was glad, indeed, when she came to a bare-footed urchin she had overtaken, and she asked him into the chaise as much for company as for charity. The youngster accepted the invitation with alacrity, and he had no sooner vouchsafed the information that he was walking from Philadelphia to his home in Trenton, being a runaway "'prentice" to a shoemaker, than in answer to her gently put question anent an officer on a piebald horse, he told her that such a horse had passed him going north but half an hour before.

"Do you wanter see th' ossifer very much?" asked the child.

"Very much indeed," answered Betsy.

"You ain't very old an' you ain't useter this, be ye?"

"No, I am not," returned the girl, slightly amused.

"Well, don't you be afraid. I'll watch out fer him. You give me the lift an' I'll take care o' you as long as I'm here."

And then he began to whistle, possibly to inspire his benefactor with confidence in his bravery and ability to make good his word.

The youngster, barely ten years old, chattered away in childish gabble, but to deaf ears, mostly, for the little woman's attention was bent on matters ahead, and now that she felt reasonably certain of being successful in her chase, her mind began to misgive her as to her reception by her lover, and the consequences of her act. She had determined

The Ride

to go on until she reached Bordentown if it took her all night, should it become necessary, for she knew no farmhouse matron would take her in—an unprotected girl—and she had no money for a tavern, even had she the courage to alight before one. She had forgotten the necessity for money as she had forgotten the necessity of food, and the lack of the latter was beginning to have its effect, for not a morsel had passed her lips since early that morning. The day's events had so thoroughly absorbed her that she had not thought of changing her dress, and was still clad in her best, which had been put on to receive General Washington and the committee from Congress. How long ago it all seemed!

Presently some lights drifted out of the darkness ahead of her, slowly growing in brilliancy as she approached them, and she recognized them as belonging to a tavern, for, save in a public house, all lights were out even at that early hour. She would have driven by, for she dreaded the stare of a tavern loungee, but the boy at her side suddenly raised his voice and woke her from the semi-blankness into which she seemed falling.

“Stop! I betcher I see that ossifer's horse hitched to th' post yender. Lemme out an' I'll see, missess. Ef he's there I'll fetch him. Wot's the feller's name?”

Mechanically she drew the lines and the boy jumped to the ground. The girl could make out a white object that might be a horse hitched to the long rail before the house. Her heart suddenly be-

Betsy Ross

gan to thump as she seemed to awake and realize what she had done, but she said :

“ Please tell him—Lieutenant Wheatly—I would like to see him—if he is there.” And then, as the boy disappeared, she sat up very straight and waited.

Lieutenant Wheatly, or Joseph Ashburn, had just ordered his supper and was lounging moodily by the window, looking out into the night, while his trooper and several others sat at a table hard by. He saw the dim outline of the chaise as it stopped in the road. He saw the shadow of a boy detach itself from the vehicle, but he gave the matter no thought. He was too greatly depressed; he saw without noting.

On entering the room the boy looked about him quickly, and at once picking his man from the scant assemblage, walked up to him and said :

“ Be you Leftenant Wheatly? ”

Ashburn looked surprised.

“ Yes, my lad.”

“ Well,” returned the boy, letting his eye play in admiration over the officer’s uniform, “ ye passed me on th’ road a good piece back. I thought you was the man. Me an’ yer wife’s been a-follerin’ on ye up. She’s out in th’ shay an’ sent me in. She wants yer.”

Ashburn’s feet came down with a crash from the chair on which they had been resting. His first idea—that of a joke being played on him by some fellow-officer on the road—disappeared as he looked into the boy’s bright and perfectly serious face, big

The Ride

with self-importance. With an intuition that set his heart bounding, he leaped from his chair and ran out.

Betsy saw him coming. She tried to obtain command of herself, but the chaise seemed sinking into the ground, and if he did not hurry it would be too late to tell him. As he approached the vehicle he saw her clutch at the dasher. He saw her white face through the darkness, and the love in it shone out to him like a beacon. As he came to her she said :

“ Joseph, you—you—I thought——” and lurching forward she fell into his arms.

With an exclamation he caught her and held her close to him for a moment ; then he lifted her and carried her into the house.

Betsy had not collapsed completely. She was dimly conscious that her lover held her in his arms, and she was utterly content. She had a dim recollection of his strides as he bore her along ; of astonished voices and lights, and running feet, before she sank into complete oblivion, and when she came back to the world she found herself on a bed in the tavern, with the landlord’s wife standing over her, and the air was strong with the fumes of camphor and vinegar.

Instantly her hand went to her bosom. The packet was there. One part of her mission was successful, but hurry was still necessary. She started up.

“ Where is Lieutenant Wheatly ? ” she asked of the tall, thin woman at her side.

Betsy Ross

"Yes, madam," answered the kind-hearted dame; "your husband will be here at once. Don't you worry your pore heart about him."

Betsy blushed until she felt the blood tingling in her cheeks, but she answered nothing, for upon the stairs she heard a step she knew, and as Ashburn entered the room, the door of which stood open, the landlord's wife, scenting a marital misunderstanding between these interesting guests, discreetly withdrew and closed the door.

By this the girl had the papers in her hand, and she sprang to the floor in time to meet the officer, who was advancing to the bedside with a glass of brandy. She sank into a chair as he came toward her, and holding out the packet, said:

"Lieutenant—Joseph—it was very foolish of me to give out at the last minute. I—I had hoped to overtake you earlier—but—but—I—perhaps I have done an unwomanly thing—I thought these were most important. You forgot them. I—I did not know what that might mean to you, so—so I came with them."

She placed them in his hand and sank back.

As if struck by a sudden revelation, he dropped the glass he was holding, opened his eyes wide, and clapped his hand on his breast pocket.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "I thought I had them all the time! It was Arnold's dispatch instead! The loss would have been my ruin as an officer. And you have done this for me!" He looked like a man who, waking from sleep, found

The Ride

himself on the edge of a precipice. "How was it?" he concluded.

She told the story as shortly as she could, and its very simplicity made it forcible. Between her words he read her suffering. He followed her, step by step, from the discovery of the paper relating to Vernon to the theft of the horse, and on through the night's journey. There was no jealousy now. He saw the light of his future happiness beginning to glimmer, but he hesitated lest he should mistake, and lose even the radiance of hope. When, with a voice sinking lower and lower from weakness, she at last finished, he looked at her, his eyes full of worship.

"Mrs. Ross—Betsy!" he said. "My debt is overwhelming. Tell me, why did you do this thing for me? Was it for pity?"

She stood up and faced him, weak though she was.

"No, Joseph, it was not pity for you. I *had* to do it. Not until you had gone and I heard my sister's story did I learn of your sacrifice—of your motive for denying me. You should not have denied me, Joseph—nay, you should not have doubted me in the beginning. I did this to make amends for myself, and—and to—to tell—you——"

She was interrupted by a quick step in the hall and a knock on the door. Before Ashburn could do more than wheel about the landlady entered the room and stood bobbing a courtesy.

"Sir, do you bespeak a extry supper for your

Betsy Ross

wife? An' what shall be done with the lad? He wanster know."

At the word "wife" Ashburn's heart jumped. His face became fiery, though the single candle burning on the table did not expose his confusion to the waiting woman, but he dared not turn about to look at the girl behind him.

"Why, of course—serve us with the best you have—of course," he stammered; "and give the boy anything he asks for. I will see you about him later."

The woman bobbed again, smiled shrewdly, and disappeared. Ashburn slowly turned back to the girl, and her sweet face showed the color of a summer sunset. Only one glance she gave him as she saw his eyes.

"And you wished to tell me——" he said, picking up her last words and feasting on her beauty as he put a restraint on his passion.

"Oh, Joseph, you are cruel! Will you *make* me tell you?"

And with her eyes overflowing, she held out her arms to him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AT BORDENTOWN

THE Wild Duck was not a hostelry of the first rank, but had it been a veritable Aladdin's palace, its beauties would no more have been noted than were its defects, by the happy couple. The lovers saw nothing but each other's faces, and the meal which they partook of together might have been an epicurean feast or the plainest of fare; it mattered little to them. Their happiness was as pure as the happiness of a child, save that it was alloyed by the peculiar position of the girl and the fact that Vernon's life was in jeopardy.

In regard to the first, there was nothing to be done for the present; as for the second, Ashburn had quickly made up his mind. Like Betsy, he dared not open the packet directed to the spy, but he guessed at its nature, and at once said that it was probably the acceptance of Captain Bassett's resignation from the British army, and had been forwarded through the agency of Radley, who was holding it when he was himself captured. Though the document might in itself have no weight with Washington, it should carry influence as corrob-

Betsy Ross

orating Vernon's story. At all events, it should be at once laid before the commander-in-chief.

"He will lie at Bordentown to-night," said Ashburn to the anxious girl. "And though I might ride to him in an hour or more, I could not see him until some time after reveille to-morrow, and, trust me, love, daylight will find me in Bordentown. I have a desperate plan—I think I know General Washington. Leave all to me."

"What is it?" asked the girl, a wonderful trust shining in her eyes, all uncertainty gone from her.

"Never mind for now. You will remain here until I return—and return I will if I have to break all the articles of war, one after the other. God willing, we will both be in Philadelphia to-morrow noon; you can not go back to-night."

And with this she was forced to be content.

As Ashburn stood on the right bank of the Delaware opposite Bordentown on the next morning, it was just sunrise and he heard the long-drawn bugle note of the reveille drift across the river. The sleepy ferryman thought he had a most impatient passenger, for scarcely had his scow touched the Jersey bank than the officer, who had been stamping up and down the broad gunwale of the boat, flung him three times his fare, leaped on to his horse, and rode up the hill in a hurry.

It did not take Ashburn long to find the whereabouts of his detachment, and without attempting to clear himself of the signs of his ride, he reported

At Bordentown

to his captain and went to headquarters to deliver his papers and seek an audience with Washington. His excuse was excellent. His papers were for personal delivery.

There is an old graystone house built upon a terrace, in Bordentown, which stands to this day, and is honored as one of the many buildings throughout the country in which General Washington passed days or nights. Across its then narrow porch, to and fro, Ashburn strode, his impatience growing with the passage of time. He had been too nervous to wait in the house with the others who desired to do business with the commander-in-chief. One by one he saw those ahead of him come out and go their ways, and each minute he expected to be summoned; nevertheless it was not until ten o'clock that his name was called, and when he was finally allowed admittance to Washington he found the general still at the breakfast table. His sword hung by its belt from the back of his chair and his waistcoat was unbuttoned. It was an unusual hour for the chief to be in the dining room, but the dishes had been pushed aside and a negro was carrying away the last of them. On the table before the general lay a large map which he was examining closely by means of a magnifying glass held to his eye. Washington's sight was beginning to fail.

With considerable relief on finding there was no secretary in the room, Ashburn advanced, saluted, laid down the papers, and said:

"I report my arrival, Your Excellency. These

Betsy Ross

are the papers from General Arnold, also the packet taken from the prisoner Radley."

Washington glanced up.

"Ah! Good-morning, lieutenant! Is that all?"

"No, Your Excellency."

"No?" returned Washington, putting down the glass and noting the officer's appearance. "What's the trouble, sir? You appear to have forced your ride."

"There is no trouble of a public nature I have to report, sir—that is, for the most part—but I beg of Your Excellency to permit me to speak."

"Well, sir—well, sir, proceed."

Ashburn wet his lips with the tip of his tongue and drew a long breath.

"Your Excellency, I am in a false position. My name is not Wheatly."

"Ah!" Washington straightened himself and sat back in his chair as he frowned at the young man.

"No, sir," continued the officer, "it is Ashburn. When you honored me with your notice and mentioned me for promotion for my night's work on Dorchester Heights I thought I was a fugitive from justice. I thought I had killed a man in a quarrel."

"Well, sir! And you had not?"

"I thank God, Your Excellency, I had not—but I did not know until yesterday."

"Your appearance belies you as a murderer, sir. Who was your intended victim?"

"Mr. Clarence Vernon, sir, otherwise Captain

At Bordentown

Roger Bassett, whom I delivered to General Arnold yesterday at your orders."

"Well! This is remarkable, truly!" said Washington, with a show of interest. "A queer circumstance—and you doubtless wish your commission altered to conform to the facts—to your real name?"

"That—yes, sir; but that is the least of my wishes. I may yet fall under Your Excellency's displeasure, but before I do, I wish to intercede for Mr. Vernon."

The general frowned.

"Is this conversation unofficial? Do you wish me to take public action on what you have told me?"

"It is personal to Your Excellency."

"You are wise to have it so. Then let me tell you, sir, that your intercession would be but a waste of time. I have refused an appeal from the young man's parents. He must abide by the finding of the court-martial that tries him."

"But you have evidence now that you did not possess then," returned Ashburn, stoutly, "and I can swear to his sentiments. I understand you will consider such evidence. Your Excellency, the day before I fought with him and thought I had killed him, I heard him damn King George up and down, and that, too, in public. This was nearly four years ago."

"That, with the rest, is something, truly," was the answer. "And what is the additional evidence I possess?"

Betsy Ross

"It is in that packet, I believe, sir. It was found upon Radley, who was recognized as a British spy by Mr. Vernon. I was present when they met in jail. It appears that Radley had been showering his favors equally, sir. He was working for you, but at the same time he was in the pay of General Howe. He has confessed this much—he has confessed all, and hoped, by withholding Mr. Vernon's resignation from him, to use him still further. This is not known to General Arnold or the court. I wish permission to return and give evidence. This man Radley has been in the pay of Judge Vernon for the past three years; bribed to secrecy."

And here Ashburn launched into a full recital of the misunderstanding, and Radley's relation to it, from the time of the mistake of the red cloak to the moment that Betsy had taken General Arnold's horse and brought him the forgotten papers.

It was not a lengthy recital, for the young man dreaded interruption, but it was forcible and eloquent of truth and devotion, though the face of his listener betrayed nothing. There was no mawkish effort to either magnify or conceal his affection for the girl who had done so much for him, nor would a lack of sincerity have escaped the keen gray eye of Washington, who, to Ashburn's satisfaction, appeared at least deeply interested in the narrative, and who smiled broadly at the part relating to the theft of Arnold's horse and chaise. The tale possessed a touch of romance quite to the taste of the gallant gentleman who listened to it.

At Bordentown

As the young man progressed, the general unrolled the oilskin covering and broke the seal of the paper bearing Bassett's name. One side glance at the document, with the sprawling signature of "Howe" at the bottom, told the character of the paper, and he refolded it, pushing it to one side.

As Ashburn finished his story Washington looked at him without altering the expression of his face. He had signed many a death warrant with the same unruffled countenance.

"Your evidence before the court might be valuable, but it is impossible for you to arrive in Philadelphia in time for the trial. What do you expect me to do, sir?"

"Your Excellency," returned the young man, "I have merely stated the truth. If it is not the truth, it is easily discovered. It is not for me to dictate."

"You have a touch of wisdom beyond your years, my young friend," said Washington, rising from the table and going to the writing desk by a distant window. "As regards your story, sir, I will say I believe it thoroughly; it accords with all I have heard. Your forgetfulness under any other circumstances than those you have detailed would be unpardonable, and had you not confessed it, and it had been discovered, it would have cost you your rank. Upon my soul, it is a strange matter—a strange and interesting matter! If Mrs. Ross was but a man I would give her a commission in the army."

Betsy Ross

He sat down, drawing paper toward him, and began to write.

"You have need to travel rapidly," he continued, speaking slowly and writing at the same time, "if you wish to save your friend's life. Arnold's courts are prompt. I can not interfere with a tribunal under the jurisdiction of one of my generals, but I can pardon Mr. Vernon, and do so believing I can do so and be justified."

He stood up and faced the now trembling officer. "Here, sir," he continued, "this is in relation to Mr. Vernon. Give it to General Arnold. You may take a week's leave. Commend me to Mrs. Ross. You are a dolt, sir, and unworthy of consideration, if you neglect your opportunities in that direction. Report to me on your return and bring Mr. Vernon with you. We will test his patriotism. Now, sir, ride for his life."

Ashburn was ready to prostrate himself. He could not contain his emotion.

"O Your Excellency! My respect and love for your person——"

"Tut, tut, lieutenant! You have no time to waste. I have done no more than is right; that is not liberality. Report to your captain. Good-day, sir."

Ashburn bowed and hurried toward the door. As he reached it he stopped and turned about.

"Your Excellency, what shall I say to General Arnold about his horse?"

"Ah, yes! Well, I can do something for Mrs. Ross, after all. Here."

At Bordentown

Washington reseated himself, and scribbling a few words on a sheet of paper, held it out. "Give this to Mrs. Ross with my compliments," he said, with a grim smile.

Ashburn looked at the unfolded sheet. On it was written :

"Horse and carriage belonging to General Arnold requisitioned by bearer for good of the service. By command :

"GEORGE WASHINGTON,
"Commander-in-Chief."

"BORDENTOWN, N. J., *June, 1777.*"

It was enough. Ashburn placed it in his pocket, laughed, saluted, and ran from the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ENDING

THE piebald needed all her powers, for the way she was goaded back over the road she had already gone once that day tested her endurance.

It was but a short dozen miles over a bad highway, but she made it in better time than she had ever done before. Whether she partook of the lightness of heart of her rider and transferred it to her heels can not be told, but the dust and the pebbles flew, and the land seemed to spin backward. Here was the speed of a lover hurrying to his mistress, and what is a greater incentive to speed?

It was a glorious day, a glorious ride, and real life and happiness were at last almost within the man's grasp.

But for a brief minute it seemed as though the cup had slipped from his fingers as Ashburn swung at full tilt into the yard of the Wild Duck and made his panting animal slide as he drew the rein. The landlord ran out before he could get his foot from the stirrup, big with news, and bad news too.

"Your lady has gone, sir!"

"Gone!" thundered Ashburn; "gone where?"

"Yes, sir. A squad o' troopers rode up lookin'

The Ending

for a horse an' shay. They found it in my barn, sir—the one your lady came in—the shay, sir, not the barn. They said it belonged to General Arnold, and they were goin' to arrest me—my God!—yes, sir, for stealin' on't, but the lady, she heard the muss an' came down an' said she did it—yes, sir, an' they took her off."

"Which way?"

"Back to town, sir."

"How long ago?"

"An hour agone, sir."

"Damn them!"

And without another word Ashburn dug his spurs into his tired horse and wheeled into the road and was off, leaving the landlord running after him and screaming for his unpaid bill.

Little cared the young officer for landlords and bills, paid or unpaid. As he flew along he guessed the trouble that would ensue for his love if he did not overtake her before the cavalcade arrived at headquarters in Philadelphia, and he knew, too, what was meant by an hour's start in a fifteen-mile course, even when the road was bad for wheeling. The piebald had gone twenty miles at a hot pace since it had been well fed, and that with only a partial rest in Bordentown; but the animal was young and willing and seemed to catch the anxiety of her rider, for she set out at a gait that ere long turned her pink nostrils to crimson and her eyeballs stood out in her distress. Ashburn pitied his faithful beast, but he made up his mind to break her heart rather than

Betsy Ross

fail to overtake Betsy. He could not endure the thought of the girl submitting to the interview she would be likely to have with Benedict Arnold, the only general in the service he instinctively disliked even while acknowledging and respecting his personal bravery. The squad must be overtaken, and the fair sides of his poor steed were deeply scored and showed bloody as he urged her onward.

An hour passed. The pace could not have been held ten minutes longer, and in the event of his horse's failure Ashburn would have found himself afoot on a lonely road, when, on ascending a hill, he saw a cloud of dust but a short distance ahead, and through it caught a glimpse of a chaise and the glint of the sword belonging to the soldier who rode beside it.

With a shout he bore down on the object of his chase, the squad and the carriage halting as he came up and threw himself from his quivering horse.

He had feared to find a superior officer in charge, but to his relief he found the four men in command of a sergeant only. This obviated all need of explanation on his part.

To the girl, who sat in the carriage with a smile now lighting her dusty and tear-furrowed face, he had at first but a bow; then he turned to the sergeant and, pointing to his piebald, which stood by the roadside with legs spread wide, drooping head, and heaving flanks, he said:

"Detail a man to look to my horse and follow slowly. I will relieve you, my lad," he continued,

The Ending

speaking to the soldier who sat in the chaise holding the reins. "Official business, sergeant. Start on."

And without further explanation he leaped into the carriage and took the vacated seat by the side of his love, his troubles now gone with the wind that blew never so sweetly.

An hour later General Arnold was sitting in his office. His sense of dignity, which was abnormally great, had been outraged by a theft the like of which he had never before experienced. He was decidedly out of temper, though he was endeavoring to keep it under control. Before him lay the short and fatal finding of the court, which had closed its session but an hour before, after bringing in an adverse verdict in the case of Clarence Vernon, *alias* Captain Roger Bassett, of the British army, who was caught, as a confessed spy in disguise, within the American lines.

The general had no hesitation about signing the document, and was reaching for his pen when the orderly, who stood by the window, stepped to his side and saluted.

"General Arnold's carriage has just driven up, sir."

"Ah!" said Arnold, dropping the quill and turning about. "Is the woman with it?"

The man returned to the window and looked out.

"Yes, sir."

"Then let them bring her in at once. Keep the room clear," said the general, scowling and limping

Betsy Ross

across the floor and back to the chair from which he had risen.

He looked up in anger when he saw the sergeant and his prisoner was accompanied by an officer, but he ignored the latter as he turned to Betsy, who, though tired and dusty, bore on her face no look of shame or contrition or even fear.

"Well, madam, your impudence has been magnificent!" began Arnold. "Where did you find her, sergeant?"

"Wild Duck tavern, sir. Ten miles this side of Bordentown."

"Any resistance?"

"No, sir; gave herself up."

"That will do. Well, Mrs. Ross—I think I recollect your name—what have you to say for yourself?"

Betsy looked at her lover, who answered her glance with a nod. Then she said in a low voice:

"Nothing of myself, General Arnold. This will speak for me."

And she held out Washington's requisition, which had been given to her by Ashburn.

Arnold glanced sharply at her as he took the note. His face turned darkly red as he scanned the short lines and the signature; then he laid it upon the desk and his broad chest heaved. Turning abruptly to Ashburn, he said:

"This is your work, I presume, Lieutenant—Lieutenant——"

"Lieutenant Ashburn, sir."

The Ending

"Ashburn! I thought it was Wheatly!"

"My name is Ashburn, General Arnold."

"Ah! Any relation to the rich old spinster on Chestnut Street?"

"Nephew, sir."

"Oh, ah! Well, sir, you have made yourself very busy in this matter—in this affair. What was your motive?"

"I have obeyed orders, general, that is all. Dispatches from General Washington, sir." And Ashburn laid his papers on the table.

"Already! Are you from Bordentown?" asked Arnold, taking up the pardon and Vernon's resignation.

"At eleven this morning, sir."

"I fancy something beyond duty lent you speed, young man. Ah! What is this? I presume His Excellency knows what he is about, but the court has just found the man Vernon guilty. Do you know the meaning of this, lieutenant? You seem to have the sudden confidence of the commander-in-chief."

At the information regarding the verdict, Betsy started involuntarily, but she became calm as she noticed the unruffled demeanor of her lover as he spoke:

"It would be presuming for me to say I have been favored by His Excellency's confidence, but I know his course has been determined by additional evidence. I have a favor to ask you, sir."

"What is it?" said Arnold crisply.

Betsy Ross

"Permission to bear Mr. Vernon's discharge to him. It is through me he is in this false position. I should like to be the first to extend a hand to him."

General Arnold shifted uneasily, then pulled the paper toward him and said:

"This matter has passed beyond my ruling, Lieutenant Ashburn. I will indorse this, however, and you may be its official bearer if you desire. I think, sir, I have an inkling of what has happened. It would have been wiser had you confided in me in the beginning—and you, too, madam. I assure you I am capable of dealing out justice and mingling mercy with it. That is all, I believe." He bowed and waved his shapely hand, then turned away.

Ashburn took the paper which had been pushed toward him. The last straw had been lifted.

As Betsy and her lover left the room, the group of men which had gathered in the broad hall to see the gentle-looking but daring thief, fell back as she walked out, unguarded save by the officer, who treated her with all deference. The happiness of the two shone on their faces, and as the murmur of wondering voices faded behind them, so faded the last of the shadow so long encompassing them.

As they turned into Chestnut Street on their way to release Vernon, Betsy stopped with a low and eager cry, and drew the attention of Ashburn to the crowd about Independence Hall. Then, as they both looked, there came a cheer mellowed by the distance, and toward the top of the tall pole on the

The Ending

building rose fluttering the first official American flag, while a renewed roar of voices and the boom of a cannon saluted the event. Betsy clung to her lover and her eyes grew bright as she watched the flowing bunting lash out in the brisk west wind. Ashburn bent to her.

“Ah, my love!” he said, “long may it wave with the purity of its birth. This country will do well to honor the name of Betsy Ross—but if it intends to do honor to her person it must needs hurry, for as Betsy Ross she dies in a few days.”

The girl turned her blushing face to his, and the tears in her eyes were from a happiness deeper than words.

THE END







1

1

1

1



